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**The
Forgotten Battlefield**

KAZIMIERZ WIERZYŃSKI

The Forgotten Battlefield

Illustrated by

ZDZISŁAW CZERMANSKI



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Introduction

ANYONE who fell asleep in Warsaw on the last night of August, 1939 can consider himself a chronicler of the war's outbreak and can present those past events as accurately as a fine watch keeps time. I awoke on the first of September at five in the morning and a few minutes later realized that at that hour one world had ended and another begun. Millions of people can say the same.

The roar of planes flying low overhead had roused me. I ran out onto the balcony which overlooked the beautiful Lazienki Park. A thick fog shrouded the trees; a gloomy day was beginning, and the planes were not visible. I thought briefly that this might be a practice raid, and it seemed to me an unwise thing to schedule at such an early time and in such unfavorable weather. After a while I heard a different roar—once, twice—and felt distinctly sudden movements of air. There could be no doubt that the new sounds were explosions. War—I thought—and I remember how that thought paralyzed me and chained me to the spot.

That was a moment whose power over me I still feel, even though five o'clock on a September morning was not conducive to a full contemplation of its effect. The forthcoming day proclaimed itself, as usual, filled with matters which form a so-called normal life. It was Friday . . . a carpenter was supposed to bring me some new bookshelves . . . my wife was to meet her sister in the afternoon . . . in the evening we were going to visit friends. All this was

suddenly without meaning. The air shook again, and the explosions continued. War.

We had been thinking about it for several months, but it always seemed unbelievable to us. We had been less lulled by the peacefulness which for years had chloroformed Europe. We knew that if it became necessary to fight we would fight, but no one sought to reach the end of these thoughts, as though it were too difficult to depart from the scheme of a regulated life. "France and England stopped our mobilization," it was said, "the poker bluffing is not yet finished." We lived in this manner day after day, only the clocks went on as always.

At nine I learned as an officially confirmed fact that which every inhabitant of Warsaw could have determined four hours earlier with the accuracy of a chronicler. Before the world learned of it and before it believed in it, the enemy had invaded our land, our people had died defending it, and towns and villages were burning throughout the country.

As a participant in two wars, one of which I saw from the trenches, the other as a member of the Staff, I imagined that this third one, too, would not remain a mere topic of conversation to me. When the evacuation of Warsaw was announced, I drove out to the right bank of the Vistula from which, according to my expectations (as well as those of others), the Polish counter-attack should have begun. That was how I began the journey which after innumerable adventures ended far beyond the Vistula, beyond Poland, and beyond Europe.

It may be that this war was the worst one which the Poles have ever conducted. It may be that it was only the most hopeless one. Begun on the first of September, 1939, it was

lost, it seems, much earlier, several years before the first shot had been fired. Earlier than on the battlefield it was decided in the budget of one of the poorest countries in the world, in tank and plane factories, in industrial preparations, in the conceptions of the General Staff. How much of tragic fate and how much of our own neglect there was in this round of events time will determine, and it does not seem proper for me to deprive it of its right to judge. This book grew out of other causes.

Once during my wanderings after leaving Poland's boundaries, I found myself in a small town in the Romanian foothills. It was supposed to be a health resort but no one sought rest there during the cloudy and rainy weather which then prevailed. The conquest of Poland had brought two allied neighbors, Germany and Russia, closer to Romania, which did not increase the calm of that country. On the square before the railroad station lay the corpses of five bullet-ridden Iron Guardists, unburied and exhibited to public view—revenge for the killing of the Premier in Bucharest. Over this spot in the Carpathians clouds worse than those of autumn were gathering.

In this town I read the speech which Hitler made on the sixth of October to Germans intoxicated by the first victory in their war to conquer the world. Having denied the conquered everything which can be denied a nation, he listed the weakness of the invaded country among the sufficient reasons why Poland had no right to exist among free countries. After annulling in a few words the existence of the state, he showed himself solicitous about the spiritual future of the nation destined for liquidation. Speaking of Warsaw and recalling how greatly he had been concerned with sparing the civil population, he declared that our capital could

have been taken in two days and warned the world not to create a legendary defense of the city which had not known how to defend itself.

After reading the German paper, I realized how unequal, too, were our chances against the Germans on the battlefield of truth. The invaders had captured the country and closed its mouth. No one in Poland could say anything which might reach the ears of the world. The enemy, as it seemed to him, had stated everything about this war, for himself and for the Poles.

Despite every criticism which can be made of the September battles in Poland, the valor of the soldiers and the sacrifice of the population will not cease to carry the essential truth of the War. It was a universal and conscious impulse—and it was an impulse which already then amounted to a holocaust. It really became one later when the struggle went underground, where the greatest force and strongest hope of future life is hidden today.

Considering this truth, I realized that only soldiers could speak words worthy of it, that only their honest evidence could reach beyond all doubt in these times of falsehoods, perfidious accusations, and outright lies. I decided to gather from those who had been in the war accounts of how the soldiers had fought, though powerless from the first day to the last of the defeat, after which the victor had to cease military operations for seven months. Such is the genesis of this book.

But much time passed before I could realize my intention. German tanks crossed boundary after boundary; the battles which had begun on the Polish plains ranged from the Arctic to the Himalayas, and the flames which once set fire to our houses today obscure an entire planet. The field of the first encounter in this war is far distant from the present battles,

distant in time and space. The country on whose earth fell the first man to die in the defense of liberty has seen September on September come and go. The great distance wipes out the view of that ravaged land and passing time ages the events gone by. Before long there will be more history in them than living truth.

When I think of this I am overcome by a strange sensation. It often seems to me that I have not left my home and am still gazing at the Lazienki Park above which the ominous voice of war suddenly roars out of the thick fog. The air shaking from that moment with unceasing reverberations again repeats its alarm signal of an attack from the sky. The world which had been revolving for years on the edge of the chasm points to the exact hour in which the change of its fortunes began. It seems to me that I am again looking at the fog above the trees and above the city—and I can not tear my eyes away from it.

There is something of enchantment in this. We lived in a country like any other, full of sins and virtues, not better and not worse than the rest, endowed with merits and defects which level everyone to the same human imperfection. One characteristic among them was especially developed in Poland—love for country—sometimes perhaps superstitious, although in most Poles as deep as only a religious belief could be. To offend this love means only to free forces in Poles which are stronger than the forces of life; they are what enable them to die with the devotion which we know from distant epochs when people died for their faith. This is, in its simplest form, the basic Polish truth, too well known to be further expounded, too proud to be repeated in disputes with people who understand the world as a sum of figures and not ideas, and too tragic to become a source of happiness.

September, 1939, struck us at the very heart of this love. The German invasion occurred at a time when it seemed that we would be free to depart from our self-imposed monastic discipline. We wanted to live as others who are no better and no worse than we. For the ecstasy of dying is by no means an ideal for Poles, although the choice of death rather than betrayal of liberty has had to be a constant one in our history. Fifty years of life in freedom and peace has been a fruitless Polish dream for many centuries.

It was probably from this love that that "Polish madness" grew, according to which life is worth living only when there is something worth dying for. In any case, about these principles are concentrated all Polish peculiarities and incomprehensibilities. And it may be that in them is also expressed the essence of the September battlefield.

This book is neither propaganda nor counter-propaganda. It does not want to create a legend or to polemize. Its ambition is to speak as a document speaks.

All the battles and military events related here are authentic and presented as faithfully as they have entrenched themselves in the memories of the participants. Because of reasons connected with the war I could not give the names of a few of my speakers; the same reasons dictated the abbreviations of the names of some of the localities. If certain figures and battle details seem superfluous to the reader, perhaps he is willing to see in the already mentioned documentary tendency a justification for them.

My work is not, of course, either a full picture or a fragmentary sketch of the 1939 campaign. I make this remark, perhaps needlessly, in order to avoid all misunderstanding, all the more since the most important events which took place then, such as the battle of Kutno or the defense of Warsaw and Modlin have been omitted.

These accounts were collected haphazardly, as circumstances permitted, and accident too frequently played the role of guide in them. It seems to me, however, that these orally transmitted parts of an epic will not pass without an echo if they succeed in repeating the truth of the Polish battlefield. Out of this truth they arose: may they serve this truth.

Stockbridge, Mass.
September, 1943

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The
Forgotten Battlefield



The Secret of the Forest

*According to Accounts of
the Soldiers, Officers and the Commander of
the Eleventh Division of the Polish Army*

THE POLISH-GERMAN war has remained a mystery to this day. The outcomes of battles are known, but already the action is remembered only by dates and official names. Everything which constituted the inner substance of the campaign—its soul I should dare say—is still hidden, waiting to reveal itself fully to the world.

This was not a war of one military art against another, of commander against commander, of technique against technique. Against German art, command, and technique there stood on the Polish side only one adversary: a soldier without any support. The Germans shattered our defense organism with formidable pincers, aviation and mechanized equipment, before it was able to lift itself and to give battle.

The integrity and unity of our army became the first spoils of the enemy, and this destruction predetermined the outcome of the war. The soldier was left alone. Nevertheless he persisted in fighting.

In his solitude there was something of classical dignity. The war, carried on by isolated companies, regiments, and divisions, became primarily a struggle between separate individuals. As the soldier had to fight, depending only on himself, not counting on any aid, so the commander of a division had to direct. This war did not develop into planned operations; each meeting was decisive. It was not carried on by a commander according to his will, it was fought by the soldier following his own instinct. It was not animated by a desire for victory, but by a contempt for death. Though all were ready to perish in it, no one was ready to win it.

The lonely soldier had to shift for himself. Because of this, he created his own art of fighting and a just chronicler will judge at some future time how great a claim he has to his own history.

The Polish rifleman immediately understood that his greatest enemy was the tank. His inadequate arms could not protect him from the iron lava crawling on all sides. With an anti-tank gun he could shatter five and even ten tanks or fire the nearest one with a grenade, but what could halt the march of machines when it stretched out for many miles. The rifleman understood that his only ally in this battle fought on level ground was the forest. He took cover in it because there he escaped the eyes of the pilot who had to bomb and fire blindly. Fighting forces which he could not rival, he saw also that the fair and transparent autumn day increased the superiority of his foe even more, and he chose for himself the night as time of action. In the darkness and in the forest his strength grew and his chances mounted. He

reduced the firing accuracy of his enemy, hindered the mobility of his mechanized equipment, and deprived him of the aid of his planes. One might say that he lured the man out of his inexhaustible store of armament and all his unpierced shelters. Left to his own strength, he would fight with a foe likewise left without all support but his own strength. He wanted to balance the deficiencies of his isolation. His art consisted of sidestepping his foe's art and meeting him eye to eye.

That way the Polish soldier was transformed from a retreating straggler into a conquering warrior. Isolated companies, stray regiments and divisions, deprived of communications, went to battle without a feeling of weakness. Despite all neglect, despite weariness and hunger, the surrounded soldier of the beaten army reached for victory.

It happened this way because he carried a weapon which no one could combat. The only Polish secret weapon—contempt for death.

Immediately he divined how he should use it. In the dense forest, on dark nights, during which he frequently awoke only to fall the next moment into a sleep never to be disturbed, he planned his battle. He emptied his rifle, attached a bayonet, and attacked. He sought a living foe. He fought with a man who was unaided by machines. They fought with the forces theirs by nature, the forces of body and spirit. It was then that the secret weapon did not fail them.

It sometimes happened, thanks to this method of fighting, that he achieved success. Among the Polish armies there was a division of whom it might be said that it won the war with Germany. One can say this because as often as it was attacked by the enemy it repulsed his attacks, and whenever it went into combat it always dispersed the Germans. If the war had been composed of separate actions, and if it

could be divided into self-contained victories and defeats, the decision would be unambiguous. The totality of the action, however, forced the conquering division to retreat.

Having accomplished its designated task it retreated—retreated during the day so that it might fight by night, unbroken in battle, but ever weaker in number and beset by the enemy in an ever tighter circle. But it never surrendered. When there was nothing more to fight with, or rather, when few of them were left to fight, the last living handful who remained of the unconquered division passed through half of Europe, from Poland to France, in order to take up again the weapons it had set aside.

I have in mind the Eleventh division of the Polish Army. The future researcher will describe its battles from beginning to end, will determine all details according to sources. This story arises out of other intentions.

On the line of the bloody march of the Eleventh division, from the River Wisloka to Lwow, lies a battlefield which hides a secret that should long ago have been unveiled.

If it had not been for the soldier who marched from Poland to France, it is possible that it would not have passed beyond the forest where it hid itself, together with the people. Fraternal forests—allied with us. Forests which were our anti-tank weapons, our steel shelters, our defensive stronghold and the fort of our nocturnal offensives.

We are speaking of the Janow forests stretching northwest of Lwow. The Eleventh division or, rather, its remnants made up of three thousand bayonets gained a splendid victory in that region occupied by five German divisions. It is proper to give the statistics of this engagement, for it would be fruitless to search in German books dealing with the Polish war for even the slightest mention of them.

The Germans could not altogether deny the valor of our

soldier, but their confirmations have a somewhat theoretical character. To say what determined that valor, where and how much it made itself known, passed beyond the boundaries of their pride. Mlawa, Kutno, Lowicz—all this could be hidden in the dust of battles raised by masses of soldiers piercing to the heart of the land. In the Janow forests, however, it was difficult to pass through the battlefield left by the Polish forces and not stumble over embarrassing barriers. In the villages there stood skeletons of hundreds of tanks, cannon, cars. Black iron skeletons eaten by fire. Equipment in profusion—all destroyed—covered the entire area. Beside it lay the bodies of bayoneted soldiers. This mute garrison of the battlefields also had to be counted by the hundreds. They fell there in fierce battles on the night of the fifteenth of September. On the uniforms of the dead Germans glistened black ribbons with white borders, the special insignia of select troops. On them was a clear inscription. It was difficult not to notice. . . .

Nevertheless this entire graveyard of men and machines did not have the honor of being observed by German eyes in the Polish autumn. None among the Germans spoke of this battlefield, no one mentioned its name. No German pen repeated the inscription on the blood-spattered ribbon. Pride deprived them of reason.

The aid of the Polish soldier was necessary. This time he had to bear witness for the Germans. He read the inscription proving that here in shattered remnants lay the combined mechanized corps "Germania." First line troops. Made up from SS-companies.

Our soldier told of this willingly, though without boasting. I met several participants of these battles in the camps of the Polish army in France.

"One should speak of this," I heard one of them say, "to

keep those battles from fading into oblivion. The Germans are trying hard to do just that. One should speak of it also, so that people might know the Germans are not invincible, that they can be beaten."

We talked long and much. I talked with the soldiers, with the officers, with the general. And with the commander of the Eleventh division. At the time when he commanded it he was still a colonel. His name is Bronislaw Prugar-Ketling.

I met him at the headquarters of the new unit which he was then organizing. He was quartered in P——, a small French town. Soldiers liked him and French officers attached to his unit thought highly of him. The entire new division shone with fame of former battles and was embodied in this tall, deliberate, but lively man. He had a kind of dignity in which one felt a rapacious strength beneath his tranquillity. His green eyes, set wide apart between pronounced cheekbones, had a peculiar tenseness. A pointed nose added to the sharpness of his face.

"It is too common a thing to praise one's soldiers," he told me, "but not to appreciate their valor would be the same as blotting out the essence of this war. Each one of them was aided by the spirit of the franc-tireurs, and over all hovered the spirit of our uprisings. We fought almost as we did in 1863. The enemy had an advantage of over half a century. Unfortunately it had to be so. . . ."

This was true. When the division stretched itself out on the road leading from Przemyśl to Lwow, in terrain smooth as a table top, and when German bombers and dive bombers flew over it, the advantage could be reckoned in centuries. It happened on the fourteenth of September after eight days of battle and skirmish interwoven with night marches. The force was retreating from the west to the east, going to the aid of Lwow. The soldier marched fatigued,



sleepless, bearded. The enemy was behind him, before him, and above him. They marched the entire day. On the morning of the fifteenth, the advance guard reached Sadowa Wisznia, a small locality on the route Przemyśl-Lwow.

It was a brutal day of incessant falling on one's face, burrowing into shallow furrows, sudden jumps into ditches, and into even the slightest flexure of terrain. Only good fortune protected the soldier against bullets and bombs scattered from the air. Whoever did not have it remained beside the

road under a small mound because there was no time to dig deeper. The sun burned fiercely, dust rose from the dried up roads and fields; perfect weather favored the invader. This march was made up of death and fatal weariness.

When the division reached Sadowa Wisznia, it was directed into the forest to the north so that it could take cover from air attacks and catch its breath. The staff held a meeting in the town. It was a unique task carried out among shattering windows and falling walls. General Sosnkowski presided. Three days before in Przemyśl he had taken over the command of what in the beginning of the war was called the Southern Front. Now he had at his disposal two divisions, the Eleventh and the Thirty-eighth. It was found that the road to Lwow was severed. The enemy was spread over the territory near Grodek Jagiellonski, the neighboring ponds, and the bogs of the river Wereszyca. In order to arrive with help on time, it was decided to break through to Lwow by another road, to make a flanking movement north of the highway, go around the Wereszyca bogs, and force a passage through the Janow and Brzuchow forests.

The meeting ended at noon. Action was to begin at the earliest time before evening. The main attack was entrusted to the advance guard of the Eleventh division.

The situation of our forces appeared absolutely fantastic. The Germans surrounded them on all sides and were ever tightening the circle. To no one did the hopelessness of the situation remain a secret. During the day a German order was intercepted which accurately described the position of our concentration and stated that "two Polish divisions are completely surrounded." The Germans even attempted to come to an agreement with the surrounded Poles. It was still light when a truce officer with a white flag and two

soldiers appeared before one of the outposts. He proposed that we capitulate in order to avoid slaughter, but our company commander refused to discuss the matter and dismissed them curtly. Then he reported to the staff.

The fighting began about four in the afternoon. After a scorching day the sky suddenly became overcast and a short rain fell but it did not bring the desired relief. The German pilots did not cease flying; they dived from great heights to the tree tops and dropped bombs into the undergrowth. The first task of the division was to drive the Germans away from the northern part of the forest which lay on the line of its march. The infantryman, fatigued beyond human endurance, with hundreds of kilometers of marching in his legs and hundreds of hours of tension in his nerves, went forward once more. There were no stragglers, deserters, or marauders.

The fighting was bloody. Mostly hand to hand. One darted from pine to pine, from one tree trunk to the next. Grenades and bayonets cleared the way. The artillery moved rapidly behind the advance guard. Guns were driven singly. Beside them walked pioneers who cut paths through the bushes and filled in holes. The Germans covered the entire area of attack with artillery fire. Lieutenant B. was the first to reach the edge of the forest with his artillery platoon and immediately began firing from both cannons. Shrapnel spread out as from a rifle barrel, striking at a hundred and hundred and fifty paces at the Germans fleeing through the undergrowth. At about six o'clock the task was accomplished and our forces reached the edge of the forest. Small meadows stretched out from the forest, filled with the lure of autumn, purple with heather, and closed at the horizon by German positions. The soldiers could see them with the naked eye. They were ordinary trenches; a yellow belt under

a dark blue sky. A hastily prepared defense. But reconnaissance established that these positions were occupied by an entire division; all the hillocks, woods and neighboring localities were occupied. They were manned by a strong infantry force equipped with artillery.

The battalions could now catch their breath. The German guns were silent. To the rear, in the forest, single rifle shots could be heard; the second thrust was liquidating lost German detachments. The sun had already set; a sudden autumn chill descended; the scent of hay and forest drifted through the air. Soldiers stretched their bones, wrapped themselves in their coats, and fell into sudden sleep. Whenever one of them was jerked abruptly, he would open his eyes and gaze about, eyes unconscious with fatigue. The unknown terrain was filling with grey shadows. Beyond them stretched the yellow line of trenches with outlines of houses and forests darkening far away. Twilight thickened; the mysterious distance was lost in the dusk.

At nine o'clock both regiments rose for the attack. It was impenetrably dark. In accordance with the dictates of the new military art, one of the roads running through no man's land between the two positions was chosen as the axis of the attack. This to make certain that no one would lose his direction during the battle.

Our forces moved forward after their own fashion, in accordance with their own school. They moved in deep skirmish lines, elbow to elbow, to keep from becoming lost in the dark. Rifles were emptied to avoid hitting their own lines. On the rifles—bayonets.

The distance was not great. At some points it was so small that our soldiers emerged a hundred and fifty paces before German rifle barrels. They stood almost face to face. Our soldiers moved as quickly and as stealthily as possible.

"I then stood on the edge of the forest with the rear guard," the division commander told me, "at the place from which the Forty-ninth regiment advanced. I was as much an eyewitness of the battle as anyone could have been in the dark. The darkness increased the nervous tension, too. The Germans began firing along the whole line. Machine guns barked in unending volleys. Artillery was bombing at short distances. The flashes of shots and explosions could be seen. Fortunately their firing was not accurate. It seemed as if an eternity had passed before we heard the single cry 'Hurrah' from many throats. The shots became fewer then, and the uproar died down. I could breathe more easily. Our men broke through and took over the positions. In some places houses were burning. In the moving light were seen shapes of running men. Shortly I received the report of the commander of the Forty-ninth regiment and in turn reported our success to General Sosnkowski. It was about eleven o'clock."

The battle went on. Snipers moved beyond the trenches into the terrain between houses and villages, and with bayonets ransacked the night which was a sack filled with darkness. The staff went about uniting the disrupted communications and recreating the situations which had shifted so often during the nocturnal movements that they were scarcely to be guessed at. The night roared with shots on all sides. Soldiers and commander penetrated it by means of sharpened senses only, not by compass and scouting.

But they did not lose their courage in the nocturnal battle. This army of madmen was not halted by the foe. They rushed from attack to attack, from blow to blow, spattered with the blood of the stubborn enemy, blind and deaf with their exertion. Until finally their battering ram overthrew all opposition and seemed to pierce the shattered night.

The darkness became grey and it was already becoming light, when the Eleventh division conquered the localities which merit Polish remembrance forever. They are the villages Muzylowice, Mogila, Czarnokonce, Nowosiolki, Przylbice, Bruchnal, and a few smaller ones which are not even on the map.

There, undisclosed to the world, the secret of the forest lay in hiding. The area in which these battles were fought, stretching from Muzylowice, presented an unexpected and unbelievable sight. Everyone to whom I talked repeated this to me: commander, officers and soldiers. They often returned to this motif, apparently the sight was for them really unforgettable.

On the village streets, in the gardens and orchards, in the meadows, in the squares before the church, school, and inn; wherever there was even a little free space stood tank after tank, truck after truck, fuel transport after fuel transport, motorcycle after motorcycle. A huge auto yard, motorized artillery, ammunition for heavy guns, ammunition trailers, lorries and ambulances; equipment of all kinds. Anti-aircraft batteries at their stations with barrels pointing at the sky, anti-tank guns at road crossings. It was the same in village after village. They were dazzling spoils, immeasurable riches. Passing detachments stopped at the sight; soldiers touched the machines with their hands as if they did not believe their own eyes.

"One could only have dreamed of it," one of the men who took part in this battle told me. "Everything fresh, without a scratch, spick and span. Only the latest models. We were overpowered with a wild joy at such spoils. We sat on motorcycles ready for the road and formed a driver's school on the highway. 'Learn to drive, brother,' we shouted, 'you'll ride in a car like a king.'"

Then he began to talk of motorized forces, of panzer forces. Everyone, from sergeant to division commander, knew their fearful strength. The division had suffered most from them. They were its most formidable foe and it did not have the weapons to combat them. They shattered the Polish army, shook its remnants, and pushed it from open battlefields to sylvan hiding places. Now the foe stood de-



fenceless before the soldier of forest and night. The monstrous force was passive, silent. Obedient to the human hand it could turn its barrels in the opposite direction, serve a new master. Prugar said that he could have ordered the whole division on the captured material and driven further. Everything was in order: gas, repair equipment, trucks for transporting the infantry. Unfortunately there were not enough drivers. A few cars were taken for the staff, a few trucks and motorcycles for the regiment. What should be done with the rest everyone asked. The fortunes of the unusual booty were determined at a meeting with General Sosnkowski. The order was: "Burn it, for it cannot be destroyed otherwise, and march on, Germans are coming from behind."

Specialists were needed for the task. Sappers came running, drivers were called from the trains. From rags and torn uniforms they soon made torches, released the stopcocks of the fuel transports, smashed the couplings. Gasoline flowed through the ditches of the village. It covered everything—tanks, ammunition trailers, hundreds of cars and motorcycles. The artillery yard and the ammunition. Twenty heavy guns with barrels half raised or covered with canvas and with cowls on the muzzles as in quarters.

Our forces with their wounded and the inhabitants with their belongings were evacuated from the village. At a distance of half a kilometer in a kettle-hole surrounded by small hills at sunset hell opened up. Flaming torches thrown about from all sides created conflagrations over an enormous space. They began on the earth in swirling clouds of black smoke and ended high against the sky in terrifying bursts of fire. Heavy artillery shells were thrown upwards and exploded in the air, machine gun bullets cracked sharply under the smoke and lifted it from underneath with flames. The roar of the shots was doubled; it recoiled from the walls of

the forest and returned in a thundering echo. When the great pools of fire ran together into a glowing flood and the setting sun poured red over the sky, the death of the conquered power held a foretaste of the end of the world.

One of the witnesses told me with deep emotion, "My heart died within me. I thought of how magnificent but, at the same time, how cruel our victory was. In order to destroy the enemy's superior power we had to burn our own land. It was terrible, but there was nothing else left for us to do. For a long time already we had been indifferent and hard; we lived like savages; no emotions touched us. But this time, just think, sir . . . I watched a church blown high into the air. Where huts had stood I saw a red desolation appear after an explosion. Towers, roofs, and walls flew like feathers; they had no weight. To the roar of the explosions was added the bleating of frightened cattle. In the fields goats ran about madly. Peasant women with children in their arms cried hysterically. This was too much even for a soldier's hardened heart. I looked straight ahead with set jaws; I couldn't move from the spot. But the jar of air after each explosion hit me with sudden blast. With really the last of my strength I repeated: It must be so, do not stop at anything. This was a horrible war. One's only concern could be to sell one's death for as high a price as possible."

The fire lasted a whole day. The dark red glare was visible from great distances. In the early morning German planes flew over and bombed the localities already vacated by our forces. The Eleventh division went on to new battles. It forced its way into the depths of the Janow forests. It fought endless, bloody battles pushing through toward Lwow with difficulty. Entirely surrounded, pressed ever harder by the foe, it crumbled slowly until, near Lelechowka, the chaplain went to the attack beside the general, and men from the

trains beside adjutant officers. But these are other tales.

I wanted to tell only of the amazing victory of the soldier armed with a bayonet over the foe armed with a covering of steel. I wanted to show how the battle near the village Muzylowice ended, a village in part inhabited—what a peculiar disposition of fortune—by German colonists, witnesses of the defeat of the invader.

To some extent what the motorized German corps was doing on the route of the Eleventh division has remained enigmatic. The new and untouched military equipment would indicate that the formation had not yet taken part in any battles. It had quartered itself in the villages and was enjoying a rest as though it did not expect a Polish attack.

The lack of any commentary from the German side makes it difficult to explain this mystery. We are free to suppose, however, that the corps was not there accidentally and without a purpose. And we are free to make further inferences in connection with the general situation of the war.

At the time when the Eleventh division was pushing through towards Lwow, the Germans were already attacking it and the hastily prepared Polish defense was destroying the first tanks on Grodecka Street. The Germans expected an easy conquest and counted on taking the city with the first attack. But Lwow defended itself with bare hands until it was encompassed from the east by the Bolsheviks.

It is well known that the Germans after each victory arrange a carefully observed and cunningly prepared protocol of triumph. Into cities quickly cleared of the enemy march freshened troops; they glisten with the splendor of their arms, strut in unending parades. This show of force is not only an exhibition of parade production; it has still another meaning; it depresses the natives and adds to the assurance of the invader.

I do not know whether I shall be mistaken if I make the assumption that the corps which fell under the stroke of the Eleventh division was to play just this role. It was to ride into the conquered city fresh, in the blast of new, unused machines and call from the middle of the streets: "See how I passed untouched through the obstacles of your armies now broken into dolorous remains. See what power I spread before you who are dependent on my favor or disfavor." Then it was to continue in a many kilometer march in its unsurpassed richness, haughty and invincible. As in a great march of triumph there were to appear tank after tank, truck after truck, fuel transport after fuel transport, motorcycle after motorcycle.

One is free to assume that this and nothing else was the assignment of the corps which, hidden in the forests, waited until it would have a free route for the parade in Lwow. Meanwhile its road was severed unexpectedly. Everything that was to glorify the triumph remained in silent graveyards. What was to satiate pride fell into forests and covered it with shamefaced, dishonorable silence. For each word about it would be a confirmation of polish valor.

It is not worthy, however, to have a memory as convenient as the Germans have and not admit that the foe defeated in the forests near Lwow fought bravely. Our losses unfortunately were emphatic proof of how he defended the power of his armament, how he tried not to retreat from the attacked villages and even from behind his machines. The Germans paid for this stubborn holding with a terrifying number of dead. The second thrust of our forces had to make its way carefully past the street corners of the village to avoid stepping on corpses. In this encounter neither side asked for quarter.

Young, smiling Corporal Ga. told me of these battles

without batting an eyelash. Half a year after those nights in the Janow forest in the silence of the French village where his new unit was quartered the horror of those battles had become impersonal and almost historical.

"The darkness was so great," he said, "that we could not tell friend from foe. After the first bayonet thrusts everything was in confusion. When the Germans ran away we sped after them to the last thrust. Sometimes they stayed in their places. Then the soldiers were mingled; each one had to shift for himself. The best thing to do, I found, was to put out my left hand and feel the helmet of the man before me. If there was a metal knob (on the side) it meant that it was German. Our helmets were flat. I would then pull back my rifle in my right arm and thrust straight ahead with both arms. Blood spurted on our coats. The next day when it dried in the sun the smell almost made us faint."

Corporal Gn. did not bring about this war and certainly did not deliberate long about death and the cruelty of battle. When it came to fighting he had this advantage, that dying would be easier and a lighter task for him than for anyone else. This was the Polish secret.

With it the division won Muzylowice, Mogily, Czarnokonce. . . . In the new formation, in which Corporal Gn. now served, I was shown maps which recreated the action of those battles. I saw the localities mentioned marked with the inscription *C.G. of the combined panzer corps "Germania."*

This was not only its last camp ground but also its last resting place. There the corps ceased to exist.

"I took a souvenir," added the corporal and showed me a black and white ribbon with the same inscription—"Germania."





The Falcons

*According to the Account of
Lieutenant D.*

WE WERE SITTING on the airfield near Jablonna not far from Warsaw. Near by there was a country estate with a Polish eagle over the entrance hall and sabres on the walls. Our planes were well hidden in the forest; the weather was beautiful; and our quarters were a picnic. We ate out of kettles, and slept on straw. We were enjoying an idyllic vacation. This was two days before the war. . . .

My companion smiled pleasantly. His lean face was a mixture of childlike trust and asceticism. From his sharp eyes peered a youthful, merry curiosity; premature lines

crossing his cheeks revealed severity and dignity. These contrasts did not cause uneasiness; they radiated pleasantly from his lean face. We knew each other but little, yet, nevertheless, I had immediately observed the nobility and purity of this man, his precious human mettle.

At least a third of his twenty-five years had been given up to the air. At one time he had left the earth on a training glider and from that time returned to it only to dream of clear, blue space. He was in love with aviation and was considered an ace among fighter pilots. He belonged to the Falcon squadron which defended Warsaw. Their planes had falcons painted on the fuselages, like a family coat-of-arms. He had shot down four German planes. The enemy's planes were called "owls," apparently the pilots wanted to stay within the bounds of ornithology.

I had found Lieutenant D. in a small Paris hotel, where he lived with the remaining members of the squadron. They had gathered in Paris from all the points to which they had been scattered by the war. That was a separate epic, full of adventures, crossed boundaries, and fantastic journeys. As they had once flown in threes so now too they walked along the Jardin des Plantes and in the Lunapark in groups of three. These young, gay boys, imbued with a simple joy of living, did not appear unusual or extraordinary enough for their occupation, courage, and experience. It was not easy to get them to talk about themselves. They considered all other matters more important; only commonplace events occurred in the air, wonders awaited them on earth. The lieutenant refused to talk about himself, almost violently and not without embarrassment, but I was no less stubborn than he. I decided simply not to leave the hotel unless I heard something from him. He smiled at this threat and began in an apologetic tone:

"The war began early, about seven in the morning. An

alarm brought us running to our planes. For a long time we circled among the clouds, directed by radio signals, and—that's how it began. . . ."

The lieutenant walked across the room and smiled again, as if to say that this beginning was to be the end of the tale. For some time we circled about the topic, uncertain of each other, as though we also were in dim clouds; then the events themselves caught us up in their swiftness; curiosity excited me, he was borne away by his memories, and slowly, inside the yellow paper covered walls of the hotel on a dreary day of a Parisian winter, that air slowly gathered with the heat of the September, saturated with past events so incredibly fleeting that even the human memory cannot describe them accurately.

"It's difficult to tell about," he continued with care, "very difficult. While I was circling I suddenly noticed a Dornier 17 coming out of the clouds. A German bomber, the first antagonist met eye to eye. It seemed black as it banked. What kind of impression does that make, you ask? I don't know. Something violent, but without sufficient consciousness. Something between anger and surprise. One has time for nothing then. I remember that the thought passed through my mind: by what right, in this air, above this earth?—and then it was gone. For what else is there? Mechanical reactions, instinct, and the taste of battle. The Dornier was close, well set up for my aim. I sighted my gun and shot a short burst. The black cross turned on its side and slipped earthward: it disappeared among the clouds, and I never saw it again."

"Was that your first victim?"

"Probably not. Perhaps I was able to touch him in a few places, but I doubt that he fell on our fields. An unimportant meeting, but it was the first engagement of my life. Immediately afterwards I tried something bigger. I was still

searching for my Dornier among the clouds when I suddenly noticed two others. As quickly as I could, I went after them and prepared to attack. Without warning I was surrounded by three fighter planes. It was as though I had been swimming in a cold sea and suddenly found myself in boiling water. I accepted the battle and came head on at the first one. We were flying directly at each other. Only then did I notice that my partners were Messerschmitt 110-s. A satanic enemy. They have a higher speed and greater firing power than our fighters. They carry a two-man crew; the pilot shoots straight ahead, the gunner from the tail. Our PZL maneuvers better, and that is important in battle, but to have three such foes against oneself is a little too much.— Now I'm just quietly telling you about it; one doesn't think in the air when a man consists of fractions of seconds and everything can depend on a hundredth of a second."

I listened to him as though he had come from another planet. Again I realized that when among pilots one always feels a mixture of fear, wonder, and strangeness. That must be the reason why the young officer appeared both unapproachable and charming.

"We were close to each other," he continued. "I kept firing steadily, aiming at the nose of the plane. The distance between us lessened with lightning speed. When we were almost one upon another we had to choose. Either crash or yield. The Messerschmitt zoomed up first and passed above me. I saw the rivets and joinings on his fuselage and was thrown about in his air stream. I was so angry that it was some time before I could calm myself. The other two Messerschmitts were circling nearby. My ammunition was gone so that I had to go down. There were four holes in my wing and my propeller had been shattered."

He spoke without affectation, in an almost dry tone. His

lean face went well with the simple words and their annalistic indifference assuredly reflected with equal precision the events in the air and the quiet manliness of the young man.

"Immediately afterward I started out again. The air raid signal was sounding. There were so many Germans above Poland that one did not have to search long for them. I was flying with two non-coms. We set upon a solitary bomber apparently driven out of formation. It was a beautiful attack. It began above the clouds; each of us successively had the German in firing range, then we came under the clouds and drove him directly at our anti-aircraft batteries. Who shot down the owl it's difficult to tell, but it's enough that it went down like a rock. There, below, we saw the line of the Vistula, Warsaw, and dark swirls of fires slowly rising in heavy smoke into the air."

My pilot described outlines of cones with his arms as if he were placing those fires on the yellow walls of the room.

"But it was not until the afternoon that the real work began. About five there was an alarm. I got into the air first and went upward faster, faster. My companions apparently could not keep up with me and joined other formations. I was alone. I leveled off at 4500 metres. The sun was behind me so that not only was I free from its blinding light but also protected from unfriendly eyes. Below me hung layers of red cumulous clouds. The combat conditions were ideal. For the air is for pilots what the earth is for the infantry man; clouds are our hills and forests, variations in terrain, and our protection. The Germans were coming on in close formations: nearest to me were five Heinkels in V-formation. 'Those are the ones who are bombing Warsaw,' I thought. The last one on the right was off slightly to the side. I was about a thousand metres above him. I decided to go after him and dived. The right thing to do was sit on his tail, as

we called it, that is, attack him from the best firing position, the rear. I had an excellent position and was diving directly at the German. My speed was increasing fantastically. For a second I thought that I would ram into him and we would both be wrecked. But the German was ahead of me as I pulled out of my dive so quickly that I almost lost consciousness. When I found myself behind the Heinkel, I came to, suddenly noticing that I seemed to be enveloped by gold-red threads. 'They're firing at me,' I thought mechanically. The tracer bullets left a powdery trail in the air and showed the gunner where his shots were going. Sparkling lines glistened in the air and shrouded my plane from all sides. A strange picture. As though I had become entangled in strings, similar to the toys which we hang on Christmas trees. I set my sights on the German's fuselage. I was no more than fifty metres behind him when I pulled the triggers."

The lieutenant made a motion with his hand, as though he were imitating the movement he had made in the air, and closed the fist which had once grasped the triggers and the stick. His bright eyes hardened.

"What joy it is to taste the smell of powder and phosphor! Both guns firing without pause. I have five hundred cartridges in each; fifteen bullets a second shoot from each gun, and I feel that they are not hitting empty air. Suddenly the side pane of my window breaks into pieces, and two small spots of fire flame near my feet. Incendiary bullets! The net of shining threads becomes ever thicker about me. The glare reflected in the windows makes it impossible for me to see my sights. I twist my head right and left to watch the traces of my shots. Later I realized that every plane in that formation was firing at me with at least three machine guns. But then I was concerned only with the accuracy of my fire and the danger of ramming into the Heinkel. Everything hap-

pened so quickly! Before I realized it, the engagement was over. The Heinkel disappeared suddenly. It crashed in front of me and gave me an unobstructed view ahead as it dived toward the earth. Will you believe that I thought I heard a shout from it? Impossible, obviously! When I came down lower I saw the German falling into a forest. Before that he had set fire to a peasant hut, probably when he jettisoned his bombs to avoid an explosion when he crashed."

The lieutenant breathed deeply: "I felt very hot then. I unbuttoned the collar of my coverall and thrust my head into the air. I decided to go back up to 4000 metres; that gave me about five minutes' rest. I could say to myself, 'if you're shot down now, at least it won't be for nothing; one owl has been hunted down.' But there was no time for rejoicing. I saw two more Dorniers and hovered above them waiting for the proper moment to attack. The one on the right appealed to me again for some reason: how nice it would be to bag another owl, I thought. I went after him, sat on his tail, and kept firing. The German was apparently being hit for he kept circling and trying to get away from me. Suddenly I felt a shock; my fuselage was hit and my plane stood straight up. I did an inside loop and only then saw what had happened. A Messerschmitt, now disappearing behind a cloud, had attacked me and hit me with his cannon. I managed to reach the airfield; my plane was almost completely riddled. I had to give up my PZL. In the evening I went to the estate. Some of us were missing. Eighteen German planes had been shot down over Warsaw; we had lost four. On a table in the dining room lay a young second lieutenant from the Cracow squadron whom I did not know. His plane had caught fire and while he was parachuting a Messerschmitt had fired at him. There were nine bullets in him. He was completely black and unconscious. That

night sleeping was difficult. I kept tossing all night dreaming of Messerschmitts, flocks of Messerschmitts, the sky was full of them. I was starting out against them alone but could not lift myself from the earth. I lay on it and kept rocking as if it were as soft and buoyant as the air."

That was how Lieutenant D's first day of war ended and how our friendship began. We saw each other often; I visited him in his hotel and met his commanding officer and his friends. In our conversations we were always carried from Paris to Poland; we moved backwards in time through the snow filled and unusually cold French winter toward our autumn, made arid by an everlasting sun, clouded by smoking fires, to be remembered for centuries.

I must admit that the better I came to know him the more I came to regard him as someone not completely belonging to this world. As with all pilots, he could only be understood partly through the knowledge of human nature. One could comprehend him fully only through imagination.

Heavier than air, he moved easily in it, flew into spaces which could not be measured by the eye and there, in the emptiness meant for the voyages of birds, winds, and clouds, he became himself. But it was neither audacious nomadism among the clouds nor a roving, solitary search for adventure in the blue steppes. In the free space above the world he was governed by a difficult and severe code of battle drawn up on the earth and perfected for years.

He had to be higher than his foe, directly above him, and climb faster than the enemy or await him hovering high in the sky. He would fall on the chosen spot faster than a thought of the same rapidity passes through us, and more accurately than his eye permitted him to see, for the dark spot ahead also moved; it flew with lightning speed over a

pathless road. In order to reach the foe it was necessary to pull out of the dive sharply, almost redoubling one's tracks. These maneuvers were violations of all the rules governing the existence of human organisms. During the dive the pilot's heart forced itself into his throat; during the pulling out a fearful pressure seemed to split his head and made his eyes go black.

And it was then that the final and decisive moment of battle approached. It was necessary to have an unruffled alertness and to concentrate one's attention in an almost superhuman effort. To approach the enemy within one hundred-fifty-metres, expose oneself to his fire, aim more accurately than he, then fire. To conquer or die.

Only to us, people of the earth, does the air seem an unencompassed desert which blinds the eye with brilliant colors; to the pilot it is a world inhabited by lasting shapes. The spreading immaterial existence is the subject of a rich and varied science comprising principles and conclusions unknown to us. In it each cloud has its own name and its own life. This science has investigated all types of clouds: single and banked, high and low, moving and inert; and the code of battle has defined the significance of each one.

The pilot attacks like a fencer moving toward his foe, except that he is bound to his weapon for life or death. This weapon combines the agility of the rapier with the destructiveness of a torpedo and the qualities of the plane, to which the man is bound, are not less important than his ability to engage in battle. Sometimes, however, the pilot must be able to give wings to his plane. All the Polish fighter pilots were compelled to do this.

The Messerschmitt 110 answered the fire of the PZL's two machine guns with two cannon and four machine guns. Our average speed was three hundred kilometres per hour—theirs

five hundred. Against our 320 fighting planes the enemy threw a superior force which could not be gainsaid. About 3200 planes of all types flew over Poland; each Polish pilot had to face ten German planes.

We could see their superiority in the fullest literal meaning of the word. Only a witness of the War in Poland could understand how painful it was to look at the sky filled with enemy bombers preceded by the heavy, many-voiced din of the engines, like the moaning screech of screws cutting roads of destruction through the air. They flew over Warsaw in formations of three units, each unit composed of three planes; after them came more formations of three and nine planes until the entire horizon was covered by the locust-like plague of invasion. The sky was the stage of a spectral theatre where the unworldliness of the spectacle combined with the horror of the events which actually occurred.

Our air was altogether at the mercy of the enemy. Its transparency, ripened by many weeks of clear weather, was enchantingly azure yet passively hopeless. Toward the approaching German flocks flew the golden-red shells of anti-aircraft guns visible to the eye in the last stages of their flight. How many eyes followed their trail, how many glances hastened to their aid, to change their direction, to add accuracy! When the white burst of the explosion reached near—as it appeared from below—the propeller, wing, or fuselage, we stopped breathing: we looked into the air not with our eyes but with our entire beings.

From our homes we absorbed all the air battles, gathering at windows; almost no one went to a shelter. There was in us something of a waiting for the judgment of justice, for the condemning of crime, for the deserved divine punishment. But the tribunal, literally a high one, did not intend the law of mercy for us. The enemy conquered the innate

spaces of our liberty, made free with them, circling and choosing spots to attack. The air, which until this time we had breathed in order to live, now sent death and destruction upon us.

From my windows I saw the Germans bomb the airfields, bridges, and the city itself. A million other people saw them also. We were torn by anger and shaken by helplessness. One Pole was giving battle to ten Germans.

The lieutenant, like his entire squadron, flew twice, three, four, and five times daily, and only infrequently did he fail to meet the enemy. Very often after shooting all his ammunition he returned to the field, took on a new supply, and rushed upwards to search for the foe who hovered over the earth. He was in the air three, and sometimes even five, hours daily doing reconnaissance, pursuing the enemy, and hurrying into an attack when the alarm was given. The war of one to ten had more severe rules than it was possible to foresee. The fighter squadron carried out tasks which should have been intrusted to other types of planes, had there been time and had there been other planes. With each day the Falcons moved farther away from the rules established in times of peace and accepted new principles: one man bore a burden meant for many and increased the power of the plane with human power. The former regulations were becoming distant recollections. Two half-hour daily flights, or one less than an hour, which were formerly prescribed, were now looked upon as a game of the past. The planes, taxed by continuous flying and battle injuries, kept demanding more attention. Mechanics worked on them only at night; they attended the veterans with the greatest care but also with infinite speed. The excellence of the repairs meant less than their swiftness.

Slowly the horror of the David-Goliath war increased. Not once did the lieutenant intimate that anyone gave way under its weight. On the contrary, with a smile which appeared suddenly among the severe lines of his face, he told me of further flights and battles. I did not know whether to wonder at the inherent courage of these soldiers or the conscious effort to equal the foe's superiority with their sacrifice. But it was enough to remove my friend's smiles from these stories to see events objectively through the sudden adventures, to understand that above those wings which knew no fear the shadow of irresistible force spread ever wider and the sky became ever darker with the pestilential power.

The fifth and sixth days of the war could still be considered periods of victory. The lieutenant flew often, pushing the Germans from their courses, knocking them out of formation; two planes—two owls—were sent to their deaths.

On the fifth day, while leading a group of three fighter planes, he encountered a flight of Junker dive bombers above Warsaw. The unequal battle was joined; each of his comrades went after a plane, and the lieutenant's foe, wings and tank riddled with lead, caught fire and fell to the earth in bursts of smoke.

"I was carried away by my success," he told me, "and immediately turned toward another plane, but suddenly my engine began faltering and then stopped turning. I was barely able to get back to the field. My wheels had been hit, the oil tank was punctured, and there was a hole in my chute."

On the sixth day, west of Warsaw, he ran into three Messerschmitts, closed with one and kept after him. The German maneuvered cleverly but was not able to dodge the fire. He fell like a rock, north of Blonie, beside a small stream flowing like a canal between guarded banks.

The sling of David was, nevertheless, becoming weaker. Armies were in retreat, units became lost during night marches and lost contact with each other. The Polish exodus filled the roads, a wandering caravan of misfortune and homelessness.

Everyone who could escaped and hurried he knew not where. The roads were covered with crowded masses of people on foot and on horseback, wagons and cars, cyclists and cripples, wanderers with knapsacks and ragged vagabonds, men falling from fatigue and trampled by the rushing crowds, women with babies in their arms, and children lost in the throngs. This was a true migration of peoples in a chaos of pleas, curses, weeping and shouts; in clouds of dust and in suffocating heat. On both sides of the roads towns and villages were burning, an illumination made up of human affliction.

Lieutenant D.'s squadron after being quartered on several emergency fields moved to the right bank of the Vistula; first to Lublin and then to Volhynia. When these transfers occurred the planes were first to arrive on the new spot, but days passed before trucks with gas and mechanics could make their way over the overflowing roads. Aviators cannot live without bases.

These were the Falcons' hardest trials. They could do nothing but wait. The German bombers flew in groups over Lublin keeping above the anti-aircraft ceiling and reaching each objective in the calm and clear weather. The pilots in their quarters then had the same experience which we had at our windows in Warsaw. To look upward, to follow with their eyes the visible gold-red shot, to lift it higher with their entire beings, to struggle in anger and cast about helplessly.

It was easier to carry out the most difficult task than to conquer such emotions. The officer did not explain his feel-

ings to me, but I could easily guess what had happened. Were they inferior to the Germans; hadn't they stood up to them; hadn't they shot down dozens each day? How could they acknowledge this forced inferiority which bound them to the earth while the helpless air submitted to the enemy?

Then Lieutenant D. was ordered suddenly to make a reconnaissance flight far to the north. From Lublin he was to fly to the Ostrow-Wyszkow sector to determine whether the crossing over the river Bug near B. had been forced by the enemy and to report to the high command in Brzesc. The order was a welcome one; it tore him from his helplessness. Normally two hours were needed to prepare for such a task; to get acquainted with the terrain by means of a map, to plan the course, make the proper wind allowance, gauge the time, and perform such peace time actions. Now he had only an hour before sunset. It was ideal—nothing better could have happened.

I remember his story well. He repeated each detail, and returned to some several times as though he were repeating the flight and feared to neglect even a small part of it.

He took on fuel and ammunition and headed north. The sun was already setting. He could see only the eastern half of the sky; twilight covered the earth. His plane flew on the surface of the turbid air below; above him the sky was still bright and clear.

A frightful picture of the land lay bare below him. All of Poland was burning. From yellow pillars of fire rose dark-blue clouds of smoke. As far as the eye could see, they stretched upward, ascending, twisting, forming braids several kilometres in length. They reached enormous heights, going up to two thousand metres before dispersing flatly in the atmospheric reversal. Details could not be distinguished clearly unless they were spectacular, such as the explosions

of oil tanks or the desperate question marks made by well sweeps burning slanting in the air. Here and there in this conflagration were dark areas still untouched by the fire. Under the bloody light of the sun, black shadows spread across them and further emphasized the hopeless, the cosmic defeat of the world, above which flew the solitary witness of its ruin.

It was a truly infernal picture. The terror it presented could not be withstood.

"At times I closed my eyes in order not to see it," the lieutenant said, "then opened them again and satiated myself with this cruelty in painful joy. I thought to myself that there was no revenge which could be worthy of this destruction."

Today, as I think of our talks and recall the lieutenant's almost boyish figure, it seems to me that I know why his smile disappeared so swiftly among the furrows of his cheeks and why his face frequently stiffened in ascetic severity. On his youth, eager for victory, fell the weight of defeat. This youthfulness grew up with the feeling that the weapon it wielded was a chivalrous, noble weapon, but it stood before an enemy whose principle was ruthlessness and cruelty. The honor of direct eye to eye combat of man against man, the dignity of the final conflict when all other means of settlement had been exhausted and when there remained only the choice between life and death, the ethics of this frightful trial—all this was annihilated. The enemy fought as if in an ecstasy of killing and destruction. He fired at pilots floating down under their parachutes, fired at children in a Jewish orphanage at Otwock, at children evacuated from schools, at women fleeing in peasant wagons, at shepherds in fields, at cattle grazing on stubble-fields. Everything that was alive in Poland he wanted to kill. Everything that was not alive he wanted to destroy. The German pilot dropped

bombs on Poles, on Polish animals, on Polish objects. He aimed at houses, at churches, at farm machinery, at watering troughs. He aimed at the being and the existence, at the past and the future, at the land and the nation.

The soldier who was not indoctrinated with the religion of hate stood amazed before such an enemy.

Our pilots underwent inner struggles with experiences



which transformed their characters and changed their vision of the world. A chivalrous readiness for a life or death struggle seemed inopportune in the face of the enemy's ideal—which was crime. The clarity of former feelings was disturbed by the cry of enraged instincts. Their conscious bravery was penetrated by the hunger for revenge; their sacrifice by the craving for blood.

"I shuddered," the lieutenant continued, "when I noticed sporadic red-blue flashes while flying above a railroad station. Something like what one sometimes sees above street-cars at night. Bombs! But from where? Who was dropping them? I looked around but could see only a graying emptiness. Then, after a while, I saw them beneath me. Two Junkers 86. One was bombing the town and tracks near the station from a low level; the other was flying slightly higher and to the side. I became furious. Diving down I attacked the lower plane before he noticed me. The plane belched smoke and banked to the west. I must have strafed him; unfortunately my fire was not accurate enough. Everything within me shook, so much did I want to fight, but both Junkers disappeared in the dusk. I had to restrain myself from following them, after all I was to make a reconnaissance; there was no time for battle. Swinging back on my course I reached the Bug, saw that the crossing was unoccupied and flew to headquarters. Night had already fallen, and I landed only by God's favor. My report was joyfully received, and I was congratulated on my flight, but no one guessed how heavy my heart was."

Now there began days of frequent flights over the districts of Chelm and Volhynia, from one spot to another, from field to field. Sudden alarms and long waiting periods in the sky, attacks and battles, reconnaissance and communications re-

ports. The duties became ever more difficult; the conditions ever more trying. The planes not lost in battle constituted an invalid unit. The Falcons had but seven planes left, punctured by machine gun and artillery fire. None of them was untouched; all had chipped propellers and damaged undercarriages. The ground crews were now made up of both mechanics and pilots. There were no instruments or materials for proper repairs; the planes were wired together and patched hurriedly. Even country blacksmiths were called upon to nurse the delicate engines. One PZL had a wheel taken from a gas carrier. No radio communication was possible. Whoever went up was entirely on his own.

"How could you endure that?" I cried out during one talk, because it seemed to me that the fate of these men had been more helpless than heroic.

"We were waiting for Morans. It was said that new planes were arriving from France," the lieutenant answered me calmly.

One day my friend and I went for a walk along the Seine. It was more like a day in spring than the winter still indicated by the calendar. A fog rose from the river, the blue sky blossomed over the city. Paris trees—the most moving of city trees—unveiled their long hidden crowns and seemed to grow as one watched them. The afternoon sun brightened the right bank and laid a warm verdigris on the glistening boulevard sandstones. Houses shone with a silver-gray patina, the national colors of Paris, and divided the air with their broken roofs, as though giving their light, curving heads to the winds.

We were talking about the battles of the last phase of the war, just before the memorable Sunday, when the Russian armies moved in behind the fighting country. After everything that happened later it is not easy even today to

comprehend that my friends of the air did not lose hope or thought of victory.

"The harder it became for us," the lieutenant said, "the greater was our fever. Yes, fever. We were ready to do everything for everyone. To fly alone against a hundred, to ram plane against plane. We strained after unusual ideas, hunted for new, fantastic means of fighting. We dreamed such things during the day; at night we could hardly sleep."

He took me by the arm and added with a trace of confidence:

"Each one of us, after all, had all his life dreamed to prove himself a good soldier."

We entered on the Alexander bridge. A strong wind blew from the esplanade. The lieutenant opened his leather coat.

"It's blowing hard today; I like that. We fliers never really part with the wind, it's our inseparable companion. God, how we waited then for its surges and changes. We thought it would bring clouds, that the sky would become overcast, and that rains would fall. The Germans would not have such weather—clear brightness in the air and drought on land. They surely could not win this war. We had not begun it; we were defending our country, fighting for liberty. Such wars cannot be lost."

Fortune decided that my pilot should receive an order which affected him greatly. It happened in Mlynów on the evening of the fourteenth of September. He was ordered to locate the forces of General Sosnkowski which had lost contact with headquarters several days before and which were fighting somewhere in the triangle Lwów-Przemyśl-Stryj. He was given a letter to the general; in addition he had to memorize its contents. There were only a few words, but they appeared to him, as he put it, more important than all the words he had ever heard. The order was to cease the

march toward Lwow, move with all forces to the line of the Stryj river or one of the parallel rivers, close the Polish-Romanian border from the west and fight there.

It had to be delivered at any cost. In case the pilot did not return from his mission another Falcon was to fly with the same order. My friend, together with his probable successor, Lieutenant K., read the letter several times, repeated it word for word, sealed it, and hid it under his shirt.

"I felt reborn," he told me, as a youthful smile brightened his stern face.

The entire world was clear before him; he understood all. This was a plan for the defense of Poland, more than that, it was the *last* plan for the defense of Poland.

"Don't laugh at me, but it seemed to me then, that everything depended on me. It seemed to me that to deliver the order meant the end of our retreat. When they stopped and dug in we would be able to beat off all attacks and wait for aid. I thought, strangely enough, that delivering the order meant as much as winning the war."

A deep fall dusk had already fallen when the lieutenant with the valuable letter under his shirt went out to search for gas. The small town was flooded by darkness; supply columns, military units, and caravans of refugees crowded the streets. From all sides came cries and questions about unobstructed roads. The lieutenant wandered until late at night but could find no gas. He returned to the air field and ransacked each corner. From the few almost empty barrels that were found and from the tanks of other planes the gas was poured into his. "Just like a charity collection," he said.

At dawn he started out. Fog cleft by transparent spaces lay above the earth. The sun, visible at first, later became hidden by clouds. The clouds, dormant at night, sprang up one after another and flowed upwards. High up—at about two thousand metres—they gathered in a compact mass

which covered the entire horizon. Under this ceiling the lieutenant flew.

I can imagine with what care he watched the earth and how he strained his sharp eyes. On the roads there spread out the picture he knew so well, the same Polish exodus, a great procession in all directions begun at dawn and most probably uninterrupted by night. Smoke rose above Lwow, air funnels strewn with misty dust. He passed this motionless barrier and found himself above uninhabited territory. Even the roads were empty here. He came above a small town, beside it glistened the surface of a pond; it was Grodek Jagiellonski. Coming lower he noticed German units and turned further to the southwest. In these parts the roads were again covered by moving men: there was no mistaking it—these were German forces aiming at Lwow. Where were ours? Had they taken cover in forests or entrenched themselves in shelters which could not be guessed at? They could not be discerned anywhere. He circled over areas where he thought something could be ferreted out, lowered his plane, looked through villages, penetrated to distant, roadless areas. He could not believe that he couldn't find at least one unit, that he would not succeed in his task.

"I ferreted about like a dog," he said, "but in vain."

Above Przemyśl he checked his gas supply; not much remained, he had to return. On some road two motorcycles were raising clouds of dust; he came down lower. There were soldiers on the motorcycles, but he could not recognize whether they were ours or the foe's. "Maybe they're ours, maybe I should land and ask," he thought: he would have reached his goal. Circling low he signalled with his wings for them to stop. But at the same time he noticed two tiny figures jumping from each machine and setting up machine guns against him.

"I became furious." He ground his teeth.

Diving down swiftly he strafed them with machine gun fire. The attack was repeated several times. After the last dive he saw the figures and motorcycles motionless on the road: only the guns slanted obliquely upwards.

"According to orders I returned to Brzezan. I was very dejected for I was returning with nothing, you understand. That same day I started out again on reconnaissance, the squadron transferred to Buczac; the order remained undelivered." The lieutenant was becoming excited by his story.

"Shall we stop in somewhere?" I proposed.

"Gladly," he said. "I don't know why I'm so hot, whether it's the walk or my memories."

We walked into a bistro and sat down in a corner.

"I was burning then too. What a time it was! I couldn't sleep at night. In my thoughts I went over the entire flight, searched stage after stage; certainly I could not have missed them. On the next day I flew again, hunted, ferreted. I flew as far as the Carpathians; perhaps they had locked themselves there, I thought. Nothing, no trace anywhere. Despair was engulfing me. The whole plan meant nothing. All hopes lost. Today one can laugh at this, I admit. Now I think myself unbelievably naïve. But then, then. . . ."

The seventeenth of September arrived, a memorable Sunday in Poland. Once again the lieutenant started out with the order. It was nine in the morning. The air, brightened by the sun, was undisturbed and clear. From the opposite direction, however, clouds were moving; above Lwow they were already lying in compressed levels.

Flying north of the Lwow-Przemyśl railway the lieutenant noted forces in battle action. One force was retreating before another. In the neighborhood of Janow, in mixed terrain, among forests, marshes and ponds he saw, in small sectors, a moving picture of war.

"I didn't hesitate a moment," he told me with growing animation. "Those had to be ours and the Germans."

Coming lower, fired at from all sides, he found a small meadow in the forest and began landing. There was no more than two or three hundred metres of free area in all. Jolting over the ground he rolled to the other forest wall and at the last moment just in front of the tree barrier swung the plane around.

"I didn't think whether or not I could take off from there. It was all the same to me. I only wanted to avoid crashing the plane with myself in it and deliver the letter."

Leaving the motor idling the lieutenant unfastened his belt and jumped out of the cockpit. In the twinkling of an eye he was surrounded by soldiers. They bore little resemblance to men; blackened, emaciated, bearded, in sweaty and torn uniforms. An unrecognizable army. All had bayonets on their rifles. "What's the matter with our air force; why don't we see you?" they shouted at him. Surrounded on all sides, they were clearing their way through the German masses with bayonets, snapping at them like wolves, but exhaustion was bringing them to their knees.

"What could I tell them? Comfort them, raise their spirits? I was so happy! I had reached them, hidden before all eyes; I had found them, had brought them the last, saving order. I knew the plan of defense; everything seemed favorable to me. Now all we had to do was shift to the designated lines and we were saved."

The lieutenant was setting out in search of headquarters when Colonel G., of General Sosnkowski's staff came up. It turned out that the general was in the front line, on the edge of the forest being attacked by the Germans. The colonel accepted the report in the commander's name and took the letter.

"And then do you know what happened?" the lieutenant continued. "I heard the roar of a plane. I looked upwards. Nothing was visible. After a while the soldiers began to shout: 'it's German, it's German.' The field emptied suddenly; everyone fled to the forest. I saluted the colonel who gave me his calling card as evidence of my completed mission. I knew what I had to do then. Running to the plane I got in without fastening my belt. The engine was idling; I pulled the throttle, and—just think—at such a moment the motor stalled. The German was approaching; the sound of his plane was coming ever closer toward us. Soldiers stood under trees looking at me, then into the air where he was coming. 'Faster, lieutenant, pay him back for all of us,' I heard in the sudden silence when the propeller stopped turning. I thought I would tear the plane to pieces. There was only one more thing to do—use the little compressed air I still had. If it didn't work all was lost, and the German would get away. I turned the spark and luckily the engine started up. The plane, facing the meadow, rolled forward. How I managed to take off from there only God knows, enough that I was above the trees in a twinkling."

He stopped for a moment. I looked at his excited face and guessed what he was thinking of then. He was leaving these blackened, exhausted men in the German ring, leaving them to new battles. They were left to themselves and could not expect aid from anywhere. If they managed to repel the threatening pressure on the ground, who would protect them against the inaccessible foe from the air?

As though confirming that I was not wrong and was correctly divining his thought the flier said:

"Suddenly I felt that this German must be mine. He had to fall here, on this spot, before these men."

At first the lieutenant flew at a low level, keeping just

above the trees. He counted on the German not expecting an attack in such a situation; perhaps he didn't even see the pursuit. It was a Henschel, an observation plane. He was flying slowly, apparently occupied with observing our units. When the lieutenant found himself behind him, he turned his PZL upward abruptly.

"I went up as straight as I could," he said, "and immediately began to fire. I threw myself at him like a shark, from below."

They were about two hundred metres apart, perhaps too far for effective firing. But the Henschel was obviously surprised and probably did not notice where the shots were coming from. Instead of escaping, he turned to one side as though he wanted to return toward the German lines.

"In that moment he lost," the lieutenant cried out to me, "he committed a tactical error."

The German plane presented its side, the distance decreased to less than ninety metres. Unerringly the lieutenant loosed a series of shots. The German first turned on his side, then fell headlong to the ground. The lieutenant could see the plane without any difficulty. It lay on a field between two woods, a telescoped mass. A fourth owl hunted down.

"From there I flew toward Lwow," he continued, "then set my course for Buczacz. My altitude was two thousand metres. A shining azure sea surrounded me; cirrus clouds glistened like chips on a wave. I had accomplished my mission, did I not have the right to feel satisfied?"

This was certainly his happiest hour. He had found the lost men and shown them the proper road. There, where he directed them, was to grow a defense boundary. They would come blackened, bearded, and bedraggled, but behind the gathered shelter they would clothe themselves, rest, and remove the bayonets from their rifles. Aid from France and

from England would come by sea and reach the battle-lines by rail. The Falcons would fly into the air in French Morans and dispel the German plague. Indeed he had already shown them how it would be destroyed.

Yes, this was certainly his happiest hour. But he should not have hurried. The happy news which he bore did not outstrip other tidings, flowing from the opposite pole. Reports still unknown in the air had reached the airfield near Buczacz before he did. At the same time when the lieutenant was delivering the plan for salvation on the meadow in the forest, another invader attacked the country.

"When I got out of my plane, I learned that the Bolsheviks were marching against Poland. But why talk of that . . . It's better to go out into the air."

We were returning to the banks of the Seine. Gray dusk fluttered among the trees. The sun was already down.

"Here on the earth darkness falls quicker," the lieutenant said, "above it's still light. One could still fly. It was in twilight such as this that I took off for Romania that day and got there on time. We delivered all the planes, there was nothing left for the Bolsheviks."

A cold wind blew from the river. The spring day, lost in the winter, disappeared without a trace. We were both silent. Dimmed lanterns threw shadows on the bridge. Only a belated white streak floated above.

"Oh, to be back there as soon as possible," the lieutenant said and lifted his head upwards.

Much time has passed. The lieutenant was leaving Paris for new rallying points. Frequently I thought about him and returned to his memories. To the blackened corpse of his comrade on the table in Rye, to the conflagration viewed from the air, to the plan of rescue and the journey with the

order which he strived with such haste to deliver to soldiers lost in unknown areas. I am writing them down now without changes, adding nothing and leaving nothing unsaid, just as he told them to me.

Sometimes it seems to me that we are still together, during that autumn parched by heat and covered with smoke, among the wanderings of a nation driven from its homes, in battles with the ruthless invader. I reflect on the unusual adventures of the "Falcon" as though I were wandering with him among the clouds, which are for him in the air what mountains and forests are on the earth for me.

I think too that there are not many young smiling men who would fly willingly into a sky bristling with enemy power in riddled, half-destroyed planes. He did not search for glory or death, courage or heroism. No, he was simply following his calling. But he did it well.



And I think further that if there is such a thing as the Polish race and something of the best in it: love of life and readiness for death, a carefree capacity for sacrifices, seemingly superhuman, an easy transition from youthful impulses to ascetic severity, which was written in my friend's face—the lieutenant undoubtedly did not fail to measure up to the standards of the race.

In these thoughts I meet with him, prolong our conversations, repeat our walks. In this way, it seems to me, I come closer to my country—its fortunes—without which the world is full of loneliness.

For my friend is no longer in Paris. He returned to the air.



A Thousand Years

*According to the Account of
Lieutenant Colonel K.*

OF ALL THE ROADS leading to Rome, those over which we were then hurrying during the lightening of the sky before dawn might best illustrate the old proverb. They had worn themselves into the flat, wasted land and they ran through uninhabited regions. When they came to rivers, they crossed them with highly arched stone bridges. In the

fields, mysterious statues were indistinctly visible—menhirs, you might say, from which the power of divine judgments had departed. These could have been roads in ancient Gaul; we might have been riding backwards in time into the impenetrable depths of past events. In our heads, still inclined towards slumber, phantasms reeled and imagination strayed hazily. The air was quiet and misty; the world disclosed itself occasionally, distant and indistinct, like twilight itself.

We rode into sleeping towns. Gaul disappeared, but time remained confused. Castles famed in ballads stood on our way and looked down at us from under bastions, through windows hewn out of the walls, like suspicious medieval eyes. On the fronts of churches argued forgotten epochs of divine images and human pleasures. The restfulness of serene Romanesque arches mingled with sudden Gothic soarings. In their bifurcations mused dignified renaissance quadrangles combining the wisdom of even lines and right angles. On tympanums the color of golden sand was spread the final judgment, full of artistically sculptured atrocities. The stained glass windows covered with cobwebs had lost their colors and looked like drab shields with illegible heraldries. Occasionally a round rosetta glistened in the dark gray air, a mystical orb on a wall, a tonsure cut into rock.

Finally the sun rose. In the fields the dew blazed suddenly and the smell of moist, cool earth rose through the air. The somnolent panorama of phantasms disappeared. A plane flew overhead; we were passing into our own epoch. The wind spread forth the French spring, the first spring of the war.

The songs of marching soldiers reached us out of some side road. A familiar melody, a familiar song: our hearts beat quicker. In these parts of France, Polish forces were quartered; new regiments and divisions were being formed.

We stopped in P. where the command of the new formations was stationed.

How many emotions awaited me there! I spent the whole day with acquaintances and friends whom I was fortunate enough to meet in the town. Each one of them, before he made his way to the ranks of the newly forming army, had undergone most unusual experiences. They had made their way from Poland through Slovakia, Hungary, Rumania, Jugoslavia, Italy. During the winter they had plowed over the snow-covered Carpathians. They were not frightened by the cold of 44 below, the most terrifying guard of the mountain passes.

German patrols lying in wait with savage dogs trained to hunt down men did not deter them. When they had descended from the mountains, they crossed the Danube on the floating ice and swam the freezing Drave. Whenever they were captured by the police, they would remain in prisons and camps for weeks, months—and escape when an opportunity offered itself. Some lacked strength, others had bad luck. They froze in insurmountable mountain passes or died of disease, uncared for, in camps. Only slight memories of them remained. The rest would say to each other: "Don't go through K.—some of our men were caught by an avalanche there." Or "Avoid the camp of M. . . . typhoid fever . . ." But nothing could halt the continued march of men. Singly or in groups, new fugitives appeared each day. They had come all through the winter and were still coming in the spring, like a nation on a pilgrimage following the call of liberty.

We talked of these things as if they were commonplaces. To cover three hundred kilometers on foot, often without a penny, secretly, through foreign lands, avoiding cities and villages, feeding one's self through one's own ingenuity and

finding one's way by instinct—that was all a part of the common content of these voyages.

"That surprises you, does it," asked my friend, Lieutenant-Colonel K. whom I met toward evening and with whom I wandered through the narrow streets of P. "And yet it's so simple. In order to fight, we had to reach the army, and in order to reach the army, we had to cross half of Europe. That's why we marched—marched, until we arrived here."

The colonel's adventures were already known to me. We had seen each other in Paris just after he had arrived there, worn out by marches and crossings. A nomad spirit emanated from him—a strange fantasy, as if from the Napoleonic wars, stirred about him. His short, thick-set figure which might have seemed to contradict his soaring spirit, shook with the force of tense nerves. He now was, one might say, a sedentary cadre officer: for several months he had been forming a regiment in that region. This change did not deprive him of the cavalier spirit of his recent roving. His face glowed again with bold and sincere laughter and once more his pale blue eyes widened with the same candid somewhat child-like expression. I was very happy to have met this man. His simplicity and ease radiated from an inner glow. After an entire day of unexpected meetings and painful conversations, I felt as if in him I had come to reach the source of all the events and moods of this town.

"In ten, twenty years, perhaps, all this will seem strange," he continued, "it's too close now. In ten, twenty years when these people are in their own homes, when they sit around their tables in the evening, each one confronted by new problems—lawyer and peasant, plumber and priest, invalids and people brimming with health, rich men and bankrupts, all these people you see today—then what is happening today and what happened yesterday will appear strange to

them. More than that, it will appear incredible, mythical. To people far away from us, gauchos in the Argentine, and the diamond diggers in Transvaal, we must already seem like characters in a novel. Time and space act like alcohol, they alter our perception of events. Now this is still alive, it's a part of our being, of our world. Someone standing apart could perhaps look calmly and objectively at our paths, but we cannot. For us they were the road to a regiment, not to history. Who can think of history at such a time . . ."

"Someone standing apart. . . ." Those words made me reflect. Perhaps someone like myself, I thought. Perhaps that was the reason I was amazed by everything that to them seemed commonplace. And perhaps the strangeness of their fortunes, which struck me so forcibly, was closer to the essential meaning of things than the indifferent calm with which they accepted their participation in unusual events.

We were strolling along an avenue shaded by rows of plane trees on both sides. As in all small French cities, it was the heart of the newest district of the city. It was somewhat too wide and ostentatious—to provide for future growth, no doubt. Empty spaces shone at us, the young trees did not yet rustle dignified and musing. The avenue did not have that peculiar charm which remains the most touching recollection of a small French town.

"What would you have?" my friend said, pointing at the city, at the one-storey homes standing beside the avenue, at the uniform yellow and drab facades. "That's the height of commonness. Only when one lifts the roofs and looks into the interiors—like Asmodeus—does each banality become a mine of singular happenings, each house a history. Well-known things: one could laugh at them or be frightened by them. Yes, history has something of Asmodeus in it, and leaves us only common facades."

The colonel's wide eyes were gazing straight ahead, quietly but piercingly. Somewhere beyond the end of the avenue the yellow flame of sunset shone in the sky. We moved along slowly and turned into one of the sidestreets and went up the hill, into the old section of the town. I was reflecting on my friend's words. Surely this always happens, I thought, when the past has not had time to take cover in legend and the present is too real, so that it does not enable one to see that it surpasses all imagination. But my friend, seeming to understand my thoughts, said:

"And if you do feel history it is like frost in one's bones. It hurts you and cuts through you. You can never forget it; it pains and intoxicates with rapture. Once something like that came upon me; it was a frightful night, full of cruelty and an indescribable exaltation. But let's ride to my place, we can talk there. . . ."

The old city rose above the new one on a large hill. It was surrounded by defense walls, ruins that move the heart. In the middle of winding streets we came upon wells cased in iron, deeply hidden in trampled ground. Here and there above a house entrance a battered architrave, worthy of a better fortune, was slowly falling apart. Above what was now a garage, a female figure under which twined a border of defaced letters lifted itself from a blackened bas-relief. Dusk was falling and we did not look at the venerable ruins carefully; besides, there was not much left of the petrified past. The defense walls connected by bastions held fleeing time in a weak grip, as though with their last strength. The splendor shed upon P. four or five hundred years ago had already slipped out of their embrace. Once the town had known fame and power, today it had shrunk to a tiny, microscopic geographical point, marked only on small scale maps.

"And that's history," my comrade took up his thoughts

again, whether wearily or satirically I could not tell. "A melancholy sight, isn't it? Now choose what you prefer: that commonness or these crumbling ruins."

Suddenly he stopped and took hold of my arm. "You know what it is I want? Life, life thick as mud, mixed with death, but life to the full. . . ." Then he laughed his loud, somewhat rough laugh.

That same evening I left P., a city I shall not forget, divided into its new and old districts, hidden, you might say, behind two visages, as if to prolong the dualism of actuality and dreams from which I had not been able to free myself that morning, whose shadow followed me until nightfall.

The colonel took me to his quarters in La M. His newly forming regiment was located in that region. The road led through flat spaces; again I rode through a half-mythical world, somnolent thoughts in my head. Beyond the windows of the car flitted the darkening contents of night, the villages, the homes. Peasants were returning from the fields. The acrid smell of spring fertilizer filled the air. After an hour's ride, we turned into a side road lined with giant trees, rode up a hill, and stopped before a large dark house.

"This is where we stay."

The colonel was quartered in the chateau of Count and Countess S. The owners were not at home, and my friend played the host. But I would not permit him, burdened as he was with many duties and obligations, to take on more, unnecessary, responsibilities. In a newly forming regiment the commander is the mother; everyone comes to him with everything. Gasoline is needed, here, uniforms there, a telephone station somewhere else. Every transport of recruits means a hundred new things to be arranged. I settled myself in the guest room set aside for me and tried not to interfere with the colonel's work. Several days I spent in his quarters,

meeting friends and observing the new formation. We saw each other during the meals in the regimental casino set up in a peasant's hut, and we sat together in the evenings before the empty house. On the sides of the road leading down to the highway stood two rows of cedars which seemed to form a spectral procession in the twilight. One of the trees had sprung away from the others, and run into an empty clearing beside the road, where it stretched its widely spread branches out into space. From the chateau a path lead to the solitary cedar; wooden benches and a table, its legs rammed into the earth, stood under the branches. Evidently it was a spot made for relaxation and solitude. My friend and I talked for many hours there at night. He came home fatigued, but never complained.

"I don't know whether exhaustion isn't the best form of rest," he once told me. "I return home burdened with a thousand things, and I feel best that way. For, tell me, what should one think of this war? Where is one to find his place in this cabal? We took on a monstrous job by being the first to meet the thrust of German machines, but here they simply will not listen to us. You've seen French liason officers in the regiment. Have you heard what they keep saying? That they won't go outside the Maginot line because they don't want to lose men, and that they'll sit out a victory behind that Chinese Wall. As if war was something in which one should not, God forbid, perish, and victory could be hatched like pullets under an old hen! They are front line officers, just assigned to us! Frenchmen, Foch's army, no one to sneeze at! What can I, a stranger from a distant land, tell them? That I've already smelled tank gasoline and the powder of bombs overhead, that when the Germans come forward in tanks, I know better than they what to do? One can't say that, because they will point out that we defended ourselves for one

month, and that they have sat behind their wall an autumn and a winter and are prepared to sit like that for years. Then what? I prefer to organize my regiment, to drown myself in work, and then rest a while under the cedar."

One day—near the end of my stay in those parts—the colonel came home irritated.

"This day floored me. Half a day I've struggled for the most ridiculous thing in the world—with no result. You would never guess what—listen. I'm building a firing range here, and on that account I've already had a month of disputes over the location, shelters, and cartridges. Finally everything was ready, but do you know what was lacking? Round pieces of paper to cover the holes in the targets. A silly thing, isn't it? But just think, I couldn't get them anywhere. I'm certainly not going to cut them out with scissors. The soldiers would grow beards before I got through. I phoned our people, the French—no one had them. I got into my car, rode to town, and ransacked all the firearms stores—also without success. I was getting mad, so I ordered some tin caps with sharpened edges from a blacksmith and now I'll have to cut circles out of paper with them myself. A fine thing, isn't it? Perhaps I'll even open up a factory and offer myself as a military contractor."

He laughed in his own manner and took my hand.

"It's not worth talking about. Come, let's go to the cedar."

It was already evening and refreshing moisture came in from the fields. During the several days I had been there, spring had spun its verdure over the trees and nourished the grass. Looking down from the chateau, one could see the bend in the side road, the procession of cedars, the highway, and the distant spaces beyond the village houses. The silvery-gray air was being covered by the misty tissues of twilight, beams of light still remaining after sunset. From the east ap-

proached the purple and black darkness of night. We sat down under the cedar; nightingales cried out from the trees, the lowing of cattle could be heard from the farm buildings.

"I'm sorry you're leaving already. You won't see my caps."

Then he added almost tauntingly: "You would see what history looks like in a private edition. A round wafer for covering holes."

The dangerous word "history" brought back to mind our first conversation after we had met in P. In the same disparaging tone I asked my friend about that night which had gone through his bones, as he had expressed it. I felt that in his divulgence that evening, there had been hidden a greater anxiety than that over the caps today. But it wasn't easy to get him to talk about it.

"You want me to gossip like an old woman," he defended himself.

We looked in silence at the fields inundated by the night, at the approaching darkness. The greenish moon was among clouds and still without a glow; here and there in the village flamed lights insufficiently blacked out.

"Do you know why I like this spot?" he said, "because from here one can see the cedars, the row of cedars below. Now that they have become dark and seem far below us, one might think that they formed a procession. Do you see it? A gigantic procession. It reminds me of that terrible night which you want me to tell you about."

He turned toward me and I saw that he was smiling.

"I don't want to be importunate," I said, "but you promised to tell me."

He still defended himself, explained that it had been a queer affair, that he did not know how to express it, but finally he gave in: "I feel that I shall exaggerate, but I can't

help that. I get to talking—you know me—when I am not doing anything.”

He lit a cigarette; his round face and big bright eyes looked quite childish in the flare. Because of the contrast, no doubt, his low voice held something unexpected in it. Even if this man had meant nothing to me, I would have listened to him with interest.

“I’ll have to begin from the very beginning, the beginning of the war. It found me at general headquarters, but you know that I am not a born staff officer. We worked in Warsaw, on Rakowiecka Street. The shelter was hot and close, and sirens shrieked all over the city. There wasn’t much work to be done. That strange war was a devilish affair for everyone, and I hoped to understand it—not from reports—but by looking it in the eye myself. I had fought in two wars, and . . . you know how it is. . . . On the third day I breathed more easily after I had been ordered to the front.”

He was silent for a moment, puffed on his cigarette, and spread himself more comfortably on the bench.

“I drove to Radom and took over the command of the garrison and the forces in the immediate neighborhood. I was to take all available forces and get them near Kielce where I was to block the route of the Germans who were pushing their way into the interior of the land. My assigned position was on a pass near Zagnansk beside the large rock quarries, well-known to all Poles. I was ordered to hold it at least two days, until the arrival of the Twelfth Division. In Radom I packed the 93rd Regiment into fourteen buses and off we went. There were two battalions, about 1500 men. From the reserve center of the Tenth Division, I took more than 3000 men and transported the whole mass of them to my position; some rode in buses, others marched, everyone

got there as best he could. The buses rode back and forth, back and forth, transporting men during the entire night. Other formations from Kielce joined me, at least 1500 more. It was a huge mass of people. I'm telling you all this so that you'll know it was a serious matter."

For a moment he paused, perhaps to check his figures or to recall other details, then he began again: "You know what



a highway was during that war. It did not facilitate transports; on the contrary, it seemed to exist only to hinder them. It was covered with a moving mass of refugees, unending caravans of wagons, people, and cattle. To beat one's way through this misery, and that in the reverse direction, was not a trifling matter. But God be with them! Somehow it was done, and my first company reached Zagnansk on the fourth, about six in the morning. I got to work immediately, designated positions, and ordered trenches dug. The region was hilly and covered with forests. The highway ran over small elevations and through kettle holes. Ahead of me was Kielce, still unoccupied. The first point of resistance on the line from Kielce to Radom was established beside the highway on the cliffs near Dabrowa. I entrusted it to Lieutenant-Colonel I. who liked it immediately and told me: 'I couldn't find a better position anywhere. I wouldn't move from it, and if it were for the devil.' Behind the heights, I constructed a tank barricade from the wagons used in the quarries. We overturned large numbers of them on the road, blocking it completely. This was the second point of resistance, reinforced by an artillery battery which I located on the right side of the highway. The main position was to the left, on a hill in the forest. It took advantage of the protection offered by the rock quarries. Do you see the situation, do you understand how it was," he asked me suddenly.

He bent lower and in the darkness placed one palm over the other, raising them as he did so: "Let's suppose my hands are the barricades; they went upwards, somewhat like steps. Behind, to the left of the highway, I placed the reserve battalion; for myself I chose a spot in the middle, between the main position and the reserves."

Again he motioned in the darkness as if he were gathering the dusk, forming miniature outlines of the position from it.

"Well, and that's how it began. On that same day, the Germans flew over us, searched us out in the forests and began a bombardment. They flew at tree-top level because we did not have anti-aircraft guns to protect us. In the afternoon I saw, for the first time, soldiers parachuting from planes. About four kilometers to our right ten men were landing, ten white umbrellas swayed in the air. I sent out a platoon immediately, but unfortunately it could find no one in the forests. During the night my telephone wires were cut; that caused me a great deal of trouble."

My friend rubbed his hand across his forehead. Around us lay an unbroken silence. Above our heads we occasionally heard whistling eddies of wind in the cedar needles.

"It was a night like this—cool and impenetrable," he said in a quiet voice, unusual for him. "I inspected my positions, and talked with my men; I knew I could depend on them. But the highway was still crowded with that unending misery: crowds of people shuffled around my barricades, wagons overturned in narrow passages. Lamentations, hopelessness, despair! In order to forget about the civilians I turned away to my men. They weren't common soldiers . . ." he smiled, recalling them in his mind, "they were crack troops. Hard men from Pomerania, they were eager for battle. And even the reservists prepared their equipment without complaint. When the Germans dropped more parachutists at seven in the morning, this time to our left, near the village Mochocice, everyone wanted to go with the scouting detail. A civilian engineer told me that in a factory in Kielce there were some anti-aircraft guns and volunteered to get them for me. I gave him a platoon and an hour later was surprised to see two guns with ammunition carriers being pulled up, and then two more. Suddenly I had a whole battery. It was set up immediately and began firing at the

German planes. They zoomed up instantaneously and from that time never flew lower than 1500 meters. The soldiers were very happy over the guns; we all felt more confident. And we all had to grit our teeth because the war began in earnest that day. About noon the Germans occupied Kielce; at two they began to attack us. The march of refugees had ceased. Heavy and light artillery kept shelling us. The Germans began moving their tanks forward; the main thrust was aimed at the heights occupied by Lieutenant-Colonel I. The ideal position which he liked so much proved to be inaccessible to the Germans. The attack was repulsed; tanks and infantry were pushed back. One tank riding along the highway was stuck fast when it was shattered by a shell and proved to be an excellent barrier. We returned their fire sharply during the entire evening until night interrupted the battle. As soon as it was dark, refugees again took up their wanderings. Where they came from, how they passed through the German lines, and how they got to the highway, God only knows. Enough that they marched again . . . marched, rode, wept, prayed, and swore. That night I arranged a little surprise for the Germans. Two officers from the Fourth infantry regiment of Kielce volunteered for a sortie. They reached the city, destroyed three tanks in the market-place, and threw hand grenades at a group of officers. Both returned safely at dawn."

My friend rubbed his hands together, and we lighted up new cigarettes.

"The sixth of September arrived," he continued, "a hard day, the last before the night which I'm leading up to. At dawn air attacks and heavy artillery bombardments began. Pine trees flew into the air—the great pines of those regions, suitable for masts. The roar in the forest was enormous. My losses kept increasing. The Germans began their attack in

the early morning. The second light panzer division was the first to attack. Tanks fanned out wide and the main thrust was again directed at the heights occupied by Lieutenant-Colonel I. He had told me, as I've already mentioned, that he wouldn't move for the devil himself—and he did not budge. Until noon he repulsed the Germans and threw back the tanks from his rock-bound position. Then I lost contact with him; they must have flanked his position. It was taken and his force completely annihilated, though I'm not sure. It affected me strongly, but there was no time for sentiment. The Germans began to penetrate to the hill on our right where the artillery was set up and at the same time to come up on the left toward our main position. The crucial moment was approaching. The German advance lasted from noon until about four or four-thirty. Already the sun had moved toward the west, and the forest resounded with bursting shells. By their echoes I knew that the battle was moving toward us. At the time I was with the reserve battalion on the side of a hill. Beside me were several officers. I remember my adjutant saying: 'The Germans are preparing to storm our position.' They stood over me as though I were a rabbi and waited for the order to counter attack. I don't know really what my thoughts were. I remembered that my line ran beyond the top of the hill where the forest ended, and that from there one could see more than from where I was standing. But some instinct told me to wait a while longer. Before and above us the firing increased constantly. Machine guns beat hollowly with a deep gurgling sound. Suddenly it struck me that the time for commanding had ceased—now it was time to fight. I walked toward the soldiers; their faces were intent; they knew what was coming. Let's go, I said. It took us ten minutes to reach the top, perhaps less. I am not sure now. We went through a forest

dried out by the heat; pine trees lay all around, knocked down or cut in half. There was utter silence. No one said a word. Behind us we could hear German shrapnel. It was the artillery shelling the spot where the reserves had just been. I wasn't mistaken, I thought to myself, it had been a good instinct. Someone ran past me holding a wounded arm in the air and dragging his rifle behind him with the other hand. As we approached the top we could see the end of the forest where the trees thinned out and our line stretching before us. From the top the terrain sloped gently downward. We slid on the pine needles which covered the ground, as bullets whistled and ricocheted about us. The sparsely covered ground before us was now clearly visible; behind the trees shone small clearings and plots of young birches. We were thirty paces from the edge of the forest. Suddenly I heard someone say: 'There are the Germans, forward boys, hurrah!' I recognized the voice. It belonged to one of my doctors, a second-lieutenant in the reserve. He had refused to stay behind and persisted in coming with us, leading his platoon. He continued to shout at the top of his voice. Almost everyone took up the shout and we began to run down the hill quickly and easily. Now everything was as plain as the palm of my hand. The Germans were running from the opposite direction toward the edge of the forest. Our line rose out of the earth and as I watched, both lines met. There wasn't a moment of hesitation. We ran into the milling mass. The first wave of storm troops was already lying on the ground. The second wave was coming up from below and all of us, those in the line and the reserve troops, were running to meet them. The Germans wavered: some fell and the rest began to flee. All my men set out after them; everyone tried to get the German nearest him. I was suddenly stopped dead. A tank! I can still see it as it appeared suddenly among

the bushes, clinging at an angle to the side of the hill. It didn't open fire probably because it was surrounded by a throng of soldiers both German and ours. One of my soldiers knocked on the side wall of the tank and cried 'Raus!' A young officer clambered out and the soldier hit him in the head with the butt of his rifle—once, twice. I couldn't watch it. The tank had brought me back to my senses. Someone brought me the officer's papers; they contained a map indicating their line of attack. It would prove useful later. A soldier came up carrying three machine guns. 'Take them to the trucks,' I told him, but he objected and gasped, 'I captured them myself, sir, please verify it.' By this time I had composed myself somewhat and thought of gathering my men. It wasn't easy. My boys had run after the Germans, and I heard shots and cries ahead, where they were finishing their jobs. I ordered a return to the line. Time had passed; it was already evening. My men were coming back up the hill shouting at each other in their excitement. The heat of battle beat from them. The attack was repulsed and everyone was tasting victory. Dusk came on slowly and night had come, my night, the one night of my life."

The colonel fell silent. I could feel the tension within him. "Give me a moment to come to myself," he said.

It was difficult even for me to turn away from this man's memories. I looked straight ahead, slightly dazed. The lights in the village had gone out. But the dark space ahead, inspired by the moon, spread out far and wide, like the spectre of an enchanted world. The cedars descended in a dark mass throwing an oblique violet shadow. The asphalt highway shone like mica and looked black and white at the same time. Mists had blown over the meadow and hung low over the earth like a sultry breath of night. The slopes falling away to the highway inclined toward the moon—great dim

mirrors, which reflected not shapes, but the silence and the rumination of the outer world.

Again I felt myself in a hazy world just as on the morning when I was riding toward P. I remembered that a fragment of this country could for a second seem to be old Gaul and lure me into deceptive moods. Time slipped out of the bounds of memory and covered the night of the colonel's tale and this night hovering over the row of cedars with the same patina. I couldn't understand why I had been so affected and now I felt the same force touching me again.

"I drove to division headquarters," the colonel continued, "and reported the repulsed attack to the general. Unfortunately, the situation was bad in other sectors. I was ordered to retreat to Suchedniow. Immediately I sent out my adjutant to my staff with instructions to break contact with the enemy at midnight. To retreat after a victorious battle is an ungrateful task, but it was necessary. After the consultation I got into my car and started out to meet my troops. As I was driving, I noticed a mass of people coming from the opposite direction. Were these refugees, I asked myself. How did they get here? I stopped my car, got out and sat down on the embankment outlining the highway. Let them pass, I thought, I don't want to wade through that stream of misery. I've told you already, that I couldn't bear that sight."

He got up from the bench and walked around the table. Although he continued to speak, his voice was not the same; it was broken and hardly audible. I realized that the man was coming to the core of his story.

"I'll tell you this right now—they were not refugees. They were wounded men. A procession of wounded men. I realized that before they reached me. I saw that the dark mass was not moving chaotically over the highway and ditches;

there was no pushing, no disorder. There was something more frightful in it. There was order in that mass. It was not a swarming crowd of shocked, homeless refugees—it was an evenly marching barrier, a dark human wall, made up of wounded soldiers—my soldiers. They marched in fours, close together. They marched in silence; the beat of their boots could be plainly heard. No one shouted, on the wagons bringing up the rear, only the seriously wounded groaned occasionally.”

My friend did not stop circling around me. His low voice now sounded hoarse. He spoke as though he were fighting with himself, as though he were overcoming obstacles known only to himself.

“How many were there, you ask? I don’t know. Many, a whole procession. Perhaps a thousand, perhaps two thousand. I sat on the embankment as if in a hallucination. I was terribly tired; I hadn’t slept since I left Warsaw four days ago. I looked at them, at their bandaged hands, legs, heads, at their slashed uniforms and torn shirts. They had made bandages out of their underwear or any other cloth they could find—anything to stop the flow of blood. I wanted to say something to them—I don’t know what—and got up from the ground but couldn’t utter a word. I just gazed at them as if I were accepting some spectral review. Some of them recognized me and nodded their heads. I grew more and more paralyzed as they passed, and seemed to be losing all sense of feeling. Eventually they all passed me, even the ambulances with the seriously wounded. They moved away from me into the darkness, marching down the sloping highway. I gazed after them a long time; the procession had been an eerie sight. Something like this dark mass . . .”

He raised his hand and pointed at the cedars standing

frozen beside the road. Their heavy shapes were lighted by the brilliant moon; shapeless shadows fell to the earth from the widely forked branches.

"That's why I come here, this view attracts me. Do you understand? Then too I couldn't take my eyes away from the sight. Something was breaking within me. . . . Through my head flew one long thought; in a second I saw everything that had happened. Troops in Radom, buses for transports, the positions near Zagnansk. Then the air attacks, parachute troops being dropped, the attack at the edge of the forest, and the tank which had ventured too far. War with the Germans. . . . Four days and nights. . . . No, they were four years, four centuries, a confused abyss of time.

"Something immeasurable was splitting my head. I couldn't understand it. I was still looking at the disappearing dark mass when someone came up from the opposite direction. It was a last belated marcher, trudging along with both hands bandaged. I recognized him immediately. It was my doctor—the front line volunteer. The Germans had set fire to the forest and the doctor had been burned when he and the others plowed the ground with bayonets to cut themselves off from the fire. 'What's happened, sir,' he asked in one breath, 'back there they already know about the retreat . . . why are we retreating?' He shook standing before me as though in a fever. Unable to make any answer, I just listened as he cried excitedly; 'After such days, after such battles! Why, the ground there is covered with Germans. Why go, and where, Sir! Why give them our land—what will be left of Poland—what will hold us back?' He kept shouting until something rose up within me and I fell on him: 'A thousand years, a thousand Polish years, do you understand—that will remain and that will hold us back.'

My friend came up to me, took my hand and pulled me close. We stood face to face; I saw his round eyes and the full oval of his face.

"I swear to you that I don't know why I thought of that. I shouted something at him which I didn't understand fully myself. But I felt that it was so. Everything that had been and was to be. All of Poland and all life in it, our four days and nights—and all those before and after us. That does not perish, it is too much, it cannot perish. That is history, if you want it so. Time atomised in existence, a time of reality and dreams, I don't know what to name it—eternity itself."

The colonel put his arms around me and shook me as if he wanted to transfer his words to me tangibly. I felt the warmth of his arm. He pulled me closer; I put my arms around him and we stood for a moment in a silent embrace. I don't want to conceal that I was moved.

We never returned to those matters. The few more days which I spent there were passed far away from memories, full of everyday army affairs. My friend's loud laugh boomed again and he did not restrain his sweeping gestures. Apparently he felt best in his rough mannerisms. But I was no longer misled.

I left La M. after a merry dinner in the casino to which old and new acquaintances from the regiment came. I shook hands with all of them. As I passed the road leading to the castle I glanced at the cedars.

Today, as I write this, I still see the long procession of those magnificent trees. I see them on the escarpment flanking the road, aged and indestructible. Through their ranks, however, shines a space other than the meadows and slopes of La M., my friend's residence. Something like a double exposure. A different space and time, other events.

When I arrived in the town P. where I stayed several days,



the old defense walls and narrow streets seemed long familiar. I walked among them immersed in the tales I had heard, unable to rid myself of them as though the night near Zagnansk had passed but yesterday.

I saw again the crumbling bastions in the old section, the wells sunk in the middle of passageways, the bas-reliefs with illegible inscriptions. But another meaning shone through these sights. The town from which the splendor of century-old glory had faded bustled with the turbulence of life. The microscopic geographical point marked only on small-scale maps had become the center of a new army. Soldiers thronged through the squares and streets.

I talked with them again and knew I couldn't be mistaken. They were men unconscious of the strangeness of their own fortune, half real and half legendary. They came here to do battle a second time, for the same freedom for which they had already fought. For everything that had been and was to be, for their thousand past and future years.

I left P. on a drizzling foggy evening. The rain and the twilight veiled the town, its elevated old section and the young trees on the modern avenue. Darkness was already falling when I found myself among medieval towns and flat, empty spaces. They breathed—I well remembered my arrival—a chaos of elapsed time, a mixture of man's beliefs and past history. But this time I did not lose myself in misleading perceptions. The night of Zagnansk gathered scattered time into a tangible dimension. It stopped only at the source of all change, at the very bottom of existence, where one chooses life and death.



A Handful of Water

*According to the Account of
Commander L.*

THERE WAS A TIME when the westernmost part of Europe became the last refuge on the continent for thousands of people fleeing from extermination by the Germans. In the summer of 1940 after the fall of France this asylum arose in Lisbon.

Throngs of people from all parts of Europe gathered in

Lisbon and probably would not have interrupted their journey there if it hadn't been an end station from which trains went no farther. Almost no one sought to rest in the mild climate of the majolica-like, blue yellow capital or sit quietly among its palms and tamarisks. The asylum was compulsory and leaving its gates was a most difficult task.

All efforts and plans—for some life itself—depended on the magical charm, the dream-vision and dream-word, *visa*. At that time only one country permitted entry into its boundaries without backstage protection and special favors, namely Brazil.

That was why we journeyed to Brazil. It was a journey not only to a different part of the globe but also into a life which could not be foreseen. As so often in this epoch which crushed everything suddenly and irrevocably, we awoke to a strange, surprising world in which we appeared different and inexplicable even to ourselves.

The magical colors of this country bewitched even the most insensitive eye. One could gaze for hours at the golden sand beaches, the grey cliffs rising out of the water—sculptures reflected from the bottom of the ocean, one might say—the green bay and islands opposite Rio de Janeiro changing colors every hour of the day and evening. The city itself, spread out at the base of a mountain range, could also be mistaken for a fantastic vision, especially at dusk when, looked at from above, it mingled the light of the departing day with the light of lamps and seemed drenched with buckets of scattered opals and diamonds. Immediately beyond the capital the country transformed itself into a great botanical garden all the more strange because the hypnotising flora was without fragrance and the aroma of herbs and bushes burned by the sun saturated the air.

Spiritual life, quiet and lack of worry, separation from the

war and what it brought also seemed incomprehensible. Bitterness and despair belonged to emotions removed from circulation; their lost echo sounded in distant, uninhabited spaces. From the friendly and sincere natives we were separated by a difference in fate, a mysterious barrier which allowed us to live with our own worries in an environment also occupied with itself.

There was something hallucinatory or at least illusory about it. Some thought that this remoteness permitted us to free ourselves from the anguish of reality and to come closer to the sublimated, true content of our time, fate, Poland. It seemed to them that it was easier now to penetrate to the core, to that in our nation which is above shocks, catastrophes and dismemberments, to that which was and shall be permanent in it.

However one described our life in this country, we felt ourselves in a split actuality, which repeated itself at each stage of our wanderings. Of life there remained the past and the future, the first painful, the second unknown. The present flowed without a trace.

I do not know what transformations my experiences might have undergone if it were not for a certain meeting which toppled me from these grim heights into the very center of the festering Polish wound.

I met in Rio a participant in the battles on the Hel peninsula, Commander L. For some time I did not even know that he was an officer, our acquaintance was entirely casual. He was a quiet, self-restrained man, not at all anxious to become intimate with anyone, whose beautiful Polish features would proclaim his origin among a thousand people. We came to know each other better through a trifling incident.

It happened that two English ships steamed into Rio de Janeiro. Brazil was not yet in the war, and the flags of the

bombed country unfurled in Guanabarra Bay seemed to be a sign from another world.

We went to the port frequently to gaze at the visitors. They were freighters riding at anchor in the roads some distance from the shore. During the day no special movements on board differentiated them from the other ships; at night they winked at each other with signal lamps according to naval custom. Nevertheless the flags flying in the distance absorbed our attention. Our fortunes were united with them.

In the port I frequently met the Commander who, just as I, came there on an impulse of an allied heart. He mentioned once that he had served in our Navy, and I felt myself initiated into the affairs of the visitors by this man of the sea even though they were an equal mystery to both of us.

One day the ships vanished. They had probably left during the night. Only then did we feel a certain loss.

"Desolate," the Commander said, even though the bay hummed with the merry tumult of the port.

We stood for some time at the rock barrier overlooking the bay still surprised, as it were. There was no one to whom we could offer a silent alliance. We returned slowly from the port. The air we breathed was saturated with dank odors. Yellow gold beat at the walls of the city. As we walked along my reticent friend began to speak.

"It's a strange feeling. They left so suddenly. With all due respect, just as our ships did at Hel. No one knew where. Later it came out that they were sailing to England. They left two days before the war, because they had no chance against the superior power of the Germans. Their orders came in sealed envelopes, and they learned of their destination at sea. On the first of September, when the war began at home, they reached British shores. Not long after they

entered service in the ranks of the Royal Navy. The smallest of fleets assisted the largest. There wasn't much, but it too helped. Three destroyers: *Burza*, *Blyskawica*, and *Grom*. They sailed away then as suddenly as those strangers did today. Good luck!"

From that time the Commander and I met more frequently. We were always drawn to the ocean. We visited the bay and spots in which the ocean revealed its vastness, or the port area about which L. said that even though it is on land its life goes on at sea.

"Just look," he would often say, "how much ocean there is here. It must have been stolen from God. We really did not have enough to sail on."

I was not mistaken in thinking that his wonder went hand in hand with a professional jealousy. The Commander was a naval fanatic, just as many Poles who had passed from the land to the planks of floating decks. He knew every millimetre of our coast and the whole history of the transformation of the sandy and peaty ground into ports, cities, and summer colonies. He knew our *marine*, naval and merchant, its training and voyages. For some time he commanded one of our submarines. But above all he knew the history of our September on the coast.

I was eager to talk with L. and visited him especially for these expeditions into the depths of memory. Finally it got so that we journeyed freely over the vastness of oceans to our own waters and coasts, probably not known here even by name. For of all the seas in the world the Polish sea was probably the smallest. It covered an area which constituted only two per cent of our boundaries. Some termed it a pond or even an aquarium.

This handful of water given to thirty-five millions of people inhabiting Polish lands became for them not only a

source of rest and happiness but a condition of living as well. Through this slight crevice more than three quarters of our export squeezed into the world. Gdynia, the greatest port on the Baltic, arose on the microscopic coast.

In the beginning of the war the fiercest battles were fought for the smallest sea in the world.

There was a Polish post office in Danzig. A number of officials and students barricaded themselves in the building and defended themselves against German infantry and sappers. They descended from floor to floor until they came to the cellars and only there were they overpowered by an irresistible enemy—the flames of the burning building.

Near Danzig there was a small promontory called Westerplatte reaching into the sea, where there was a transfer station leased to Poland by the Free City. Westerplatte had an area of one square kilometre. A force of 175 soldiers and five officers defended itself there for seven days. The Germans made thirteen attacks on Westerplatte but did not win this one Polish kilometre by storm. It fell into their hands only when fifty half-dead men who were left of the garrison could no longer find any ammunition in the barracks smashed to pieces by sea and ground artillery and by dive-bombers.

That was how Poles shut themselves up in Danzig to fight and die.

On the Polish coast battles no less fierce were taking place. In the area were nine battalions cut off from the rest of the country on the first day of war. They took up positions on the last belt of land beyond which the sea began. That earth—meadows sown with withering black brooms, brown peat valleys, pine forests with hidden lakes—looked on for twelve days at the battle which these soldiers, stubborn, unbelievable, blind to the superiority of the enemy, put up for it. In

offensive sweeps they forced themselves into Danzig territory as far as Oliwa and did not want to withdraw even when called back by orders. They attacked the Germans from the rear, as at Kartuzy, where they wiped out the garrison and returned with prisoners and rich booty. They became famous for their forays in an armored phantom-like train called the Kashube Dragon, which appeared suddenly among the Germans, slashed at them, and vanished uncaught, even though it was held down to the earth by iron and did not fly in the air.

After twelve days of battle this mangled force, despite the addition of two battalions of sailors, had to leave the meadows, forests, and peat marshes and shorten its overlong front. Gdynia was given up to the Germans, and the remaining forces gathered on what was left of Polish ground, in the bleak area of Oksywie, the naval port. The free coast diminished to five square kilometres.

There the remaining units stood fast and fought to the end, without cover and attacked from all sides; from the air, by land and by sea. Their resistance was so bitter that the Germans were forced to add a second division to the one already attacking them. But even this superior power was kept back for seven days by the fire of the defenders.

The nineteenth of September came and with it the end of the Polish coastal Thermopylae. An attack of all possible German forces, infantry, tanks, planes, field artillery and ship batteries tore the last breath out of Oksywie. When the German attacks had gained the bare plateau and levelled the naval barracks, the Polish commander, fighting beside his soldiers although wounded in a previous battle, still sought to continue the struggle in the last cover the terrain afforded, a slight ravine known as Babi Dol. With thirty men he defended himself until he had one bullet left. He did not shoot

this bullet at the Germans but left it in the heated rifle for himself.

That was how Colonel Dabek, the commander of the coastal defense, died. In one of the last orders on Oksywie he said: "We have nothing else left, but we still have our soldierly honor."

As the Commander related these events the shallow Oksywie ravine widened to unusual dimensions. "This all took place almost before our eyes," he sometimes added. He spoke without a trace of pathos, but even the simple chronicle of these memories had a strength which could not be withstood.

Before the eyes of these sailors perished also the Polish fleet, left behind for the defense of the Polish coast and thereby foredoomed to destruction. The destroyer Mazur struck by an aerial bomb fired back savagely while it was sinking and Lieutenant D. who was in charge of the anti-aircraft batteries did not leave his guns even when the deck was under water. A trawler, the Mewa, during one of the air attacks lost its entire crew overboard from the force of an explosion, but Captain L., twice wounded, lying near the guns was able to mobilize gun crews from among the mechanics and engineers below deck and kept firing to the end. The minelayer Gryf and the destroyer Wicher, though moored to the shore repelled the attack of two German destroyers. Our first salvo was so accurate that it forced one of the German ships to a withdrawal, during which it sank. Five submarines sought encounters with the Germans who, however, did not venture beyond a depth of twelve metres which is inadequate for underwater attacks. Ceaselessly attacked from the air the submarines hid under the surface of the sea and dived to the bottom. Their later fortunes made up of the most hazardous enterprises belong to the realm of

impossibilities. Although all were damaged none fell into German hands. The three hardest hit took shelter in Sweden. Two, the Wilk and the Orzel, reached England after slipping through the German cordon and the Danish straits. The Orzel accomplished this feat without maps.

Many of these things I already knew from other people. But they had never lived in me with such permeating distinctness as they did now when related by this quiet, deliberate man who had witnessed them.

"No matter from what spot on Hel one looked through glasses," he said, "one could not recognize the world. Clouds of smoke rolled in from the land, the sea was covered with fighting ships, and the air was full of attacking planes. That was how the land of Polish vacations looked. That was how our sea station perished. Everything that we had come to love most. And Hel was also a inferno in itself."

Having so little of the sea we chose from among its regions this particular peninsula as an area of special affection. A narrow belt of earth escaped thirty-five miles from the mainland and settled itself in the Baltic like a natural dam. Hel was made from the sands carried into the sea by the Vistula as though this river wanted to extend our land. The peninsula maintained itself on these frequently unfriendly and stormy waters through human aid. It was reinforced by special fascines, made higher by pine forests, and the crumbling banks were held down by numerous plants among which the beautiful thistle spread itself out on the sands like a hen protecting her timid family under her wings.

On this streak of earth curved in the sea like a claw the inhabitants of a few settlements and Kashube harbors led a hard, industrious life. Where the peninsula joined the mainland we built a fishing port, from which fishing boats sailed on long voyages into the Baltic and the Atlantic. At

its tip, in the town named in common with the entire peninsula, the old harbor was deepened and military fortifications were going up. A sea fort was to be built. This strip of land was joined to the rest of the country by a railroad which we put down tenderly on the uncertain ground and which brought thousands of visitors each summer from every part of Poland, especially active singing swarms of children and young campers. Young sailors sailed on their yachts from here to Sweden and to various Baltic islands. Eager apprentices came to know the sea here, and it was here that professors and students studied plankton from their specially equipped boats. Those who sought quiet walked among the high red pines in Jurat where half tamed does did not stop browsing at the sight of a man, and the air combined the sharp smell of the sea with the specific fragrance of the pines.

"Hel was really a mathematical trap for us," the Commander once said. "Thirty-five kilometres of peninsula produced in numbers seventy kilometres of coast line. But what did that amount to, since the peninsula in its widest spot extended only two kilometres and its narrowest point covered only 150 metres. That's good for statistics, but not for living. In addition to Hel we had only sixty-five kilometres of coast line. Just compare now our poverty with these thousands which surround us here and tell me what we were to do with our love."

It may have been that the consciousness of this disproportion and incommensurability with the world was one of the incentives of Polish ambition and in time of war a spur to increased resistance. In any case Hel was defended as fiercely as one defends a most ardent love.

When Colonel Dabek's last shot rang out in the ravine on Oksywie, Polish resistance was transferred to the peninsula.

Cut off from the mainland on the fourteenth of September, Hel had not much more than two thousand soldiers for its defense and from the first day of the war had been subjected to most trying ordeals. First came the air attacks which set fire to the pine forests made dry by the continued hot weather. Into this conflagration whose smoke the wind would not blow away fell bombs and artillery shells. Two German cruisers, obsolete but equipped with new guns, the Schlesien and the Schleswig-Holstein—the latter known to the Poles from the battle on Westerplatte—shelled Hel with 280 millimetre guns. Two 150 millimetre batteries mounted on mobile platforms, an armored train coming up from Puck, and the artillery of the attacking infantry kept up a constant barrage from the conquered coast.

In this rain of fire one did not know where to take cover or whom to fight. Day after day news came of another ship sunk, of another fierce attack. At one time thirty-five bombs were dropped on the submarine Sep and fifty-three on the Rys. The crews of the rescued boats came out only half conscious.

But the fearful nervous tension and the fury of destruction did not overcome the defenders. The hopeless position, being surrounded by the sea and being fired at from all sides, did not keep them from returning a constant fire.

Hel did not have an air field and was forced to defend itself from the ground. The anti-aircraft gunners performed wonders. Their companions looked upon this duel of gunners bound to the peninsula-raft with swarms of planes circling overhead as the only possible means of retaliation. Every plane shot down was rewarded by loud shouts from all the units. Not a day passed in which the almost deafened garrison did not raise such a cheer.

The guns of the ships which had been damaged in battle

and which had returned only to sink were demounted and set up in new positions; the sailors became infantrymen and gunners. Those trawlers which had not yet been sunk went out each night on unbelievably difficult missions among the German ships to lay mines in the Bay of Danzig which seemed to be completely occupied by the enemy. At the tip of the peninsula the commander of the battery stood wrapped in bandages beside his guns, having wilfully escaped from the hospital. One Polish salvo landed accurately on the cruiser Schleswig-Holstein, disabled one of its gun turrets, and silenced its biggest guns.

By land, however, the foe was slowly entering upon the Polish dam. He was repulsed by counterattacks one of which, made by sailors, annihilated the intruders and reached as far as Swarzew. But the Germans returned a second and a third time, with fresh forces. The main attack was entrusted to a crack regiment, the famous Klehm-Regiment, named after its commander.

After being painfully mauled in these frontal assaults by the desperate men on Hel they adopted tactics to which there seemed to be no answer. They massed an enormous amount of artillery and began shelling the earth of the narrow peninsula metre by metre, with a fire which nothing could withstand. The attacking infantry came upon a veritable debris of terrain which had once demanded so much toil and labor in order to exist and maintain itself in the sea. Hel, attacked in this way at its base, under artillery fire along its entire length, and shattered by the strongest concentration of fire at its tip, was being engulfed by an irresistible force.

Headquarters was forced to try its last chance. It was decided to blow up the narrowest portion of the peninsula

and thus cut themselves off from the attacking Germans, at least for some time.

"In place of the peninsula we were to create an island," the Commander said. "I was commanded to carry out the order."

As commander of the submarine fleet he had under his control the supplies of torpedoes used by the submarines. Because these ships had all been damaged there was no further point in keeping the torpedoes. They were designated for another task now, for ground defense. The Commander planned to use them for mine fields.

The torpedo heads were used for this purpose. They are the forward parts, filled with explosives. Their strength was great; they weighed 660-700 pounds apiece.

The Commander decided to lay down three mine fields. One was to be located a kilometre beyond the locality Chalupy; the second three kilometres behind the first; and the third before Kuznice, approximately in the middle of the peninsula where there were previously erected concrete reinforcements.

For the first line L. chose the narrowest part of Hel stretching 150 metres from sea to sea. Work was begun on the night of the seventeenth of September. The yellow painted heads were detached from the torpedoes, loaded on trucks and transported from the shelters to the position. Thirty heads with a combined weight of ten tons were used in the first line. It took two nights to transport all of them. At the same time sappers began to dig holes, which could also be done only under cover of night. Every precaution was taken to complete the mining undetected by the Germans. Besides, all work was impossible during the day because of the air attacks and artillery fire.

The torpedo heads were arranged in chessboard fashion at intervals of ten metres. They were connected by a detonating fuse. A firing post was built in a special trench behind the mine field from which one motion of a hand was to blow the isthmus into the air. The post was also connected with the underground explosive system of the field by means of a detonating fuse and in addition to that by means of double electric wires. This gave a maximum certainty that the explosion would not fail. Immediately behind the mine field there was a forest. A belt running parallel to the field was cut down and an abatis constructed from it. The first line was completed on the twentieth of September. Hel was mined. The Commander began the construction of the second and third fields.

Meanwhile the battle was continuing as usual beyond the field. The Germans after each attack brought their artillery up closer and set up barbed wire defenses. On the twentieth a Polish counterattack was still able to penetrate their defenses and drive back the invaders from conquered ground. But five days later Hel was to become an island.

As always the Germans began their action with a fierce artillery barrage. An hour long hurricane of fire flooded the small area with exploding lava. Then the infantry moved to the attack. Signalmen ran along the beaches in the first line. They signalled to observers how far the infantry had reached and where to throw the artillery fire forward. Our units kept withdrawing until they were behind the mine field. A mining patrol with a naval officer, Lieutenant J., remained in the firing post.

"I talked with him afterwards," the Commander said. "You can easily guess how curious I was about every detail. Night and day I couldn't rest, not knowing whether my work would be of any use. My part was the preparation;

one second alone was to decide the matter without me. The lieutenant told me that he had a moment of anxious suspense. He saw the Germans coming into the open terrain and the artillery throwing its fire forward metre by metre. They passed the ruined houses in Chalupy, entered finally on the mine field, and reached the clearing where we had built the abatis. The deciding moment was approaching, my lone second. Lieutenant J. threw the electric switch—we call it a lighter. Would there be an explosion or not? The artillery might have disrupted the connection with the firing post. But the torpedoes apparently felt secure in their hiding places. Ten tons exploded under ground. Separate craters joined swiftly; the water rushed in from both sides and covered the breach almost instantly. The German attack was halted in that chasm. Hel became an island. That was my apogee,” he concluded.

While telling me about this the Commander did not vary his controlled voice. He never commented on the related facts. Now he limited himself to a few words.

“That second gave me a foretaste of victory, something that fate denied us in this war. Despair is not the natural substance of life, even though one can live on narcotics. For a while only, but one can do it.”

Hel lived through in this fashion to the first of October. It obstinately defended the remaining shred of Polish earth. The battles diminished the new island, unknown on any map, even more. Withdrawing forces blew up the second line and took cover behind the last. Further defense became impossible, however; provisions and ammunition were exhausted.

On the first of October at two in the afternoon all military activity ceased according to the conditions of surrender. Five minutes before that, at 1:55, Polish artillery brought

down one more plane. It repulsed the last very fierce air attack made by the Germans which seemed to have no intelligible cause except a wild desire to kill Poles.

It was the fifty-third plane shot down in defense of the sea. Afterwards Hel was silent. The antenna on Poland's roof told the world everything.

The Commander was taken prisoner. While deactivating the mine field according to the conditions of surrender he frequently talked with the Germans. They had considered the peninsula impregnable. Headquarters had planned a landing in which sixty ships and two hundred bombers were to take part. Troops were to be set ashore on both flanks of the defenders. They called Hel a volcano.

My friend did not comment on the facts. We understood each other without that. It was enough to look around at the merry and fortunate Brazilian ocean and compare it with the fate of our waters, squeezed in a stiffening hand.





The Talisman

*According to the Account of
Major A.*

YES, IT HAPPENED in the same month. There was a difference, however, in that April under the Tropic of Capricorn is already fall and the expectation of winter, and in France it had been a time of chilling winds and pre-spring hopes. The Brazilian sky saturated with light knows no fall sadness or grief. The bindweed covered jacarands growing beside the house in which I live stand motionless in the blazing heat. From their hanging boughs a withering leaf floats downward and dark bronze pods fall from time to time. In the shade of the enormous tree, in the garden which separates me from the roaring city, I can hide from the heat, reminisce, and even write these words.

There, in a dismal almost empty village, poplars stood before the house, the wind whistled shrilly, and rain clouds covered the horizon. The slender trees seemed to float in the low lying fog which looked like white water. A mossy epidermis grew over them, a mysterious tree plankton, carried in by century-old winds, in which the distant ocean blended with the dust of the land. On the small twigs there were clumps of mistletoe, similar to bird nests.

I had arrived in those parts with an army theatrical unit. We were greeted by Major A., a robust man with a ruddy face and a sweeping mustache. If he had not worn a uniform one could have taken him for a Podolian farmer. But he was an insatiable and fierce soldier, well known in many campaigns. The troupe, which contained some excellent talent, produced evening shows made up of songs, sketches, declamations, and piano performances. I had never seen a more appreciative audience than in these halls filled with soldiers whose shaven heads glistened in the dim light. The curtain kept going up continually, for the actor directing the troupe did not want to forego even the slightest applause. During the first performance Major A.'s battalion greeted us most warmly. I stood backstage with our host and heard the building shake with applause and cheers.

"Up, up again! Pull faster," the director shouted to the soldier who was pulling at the curtain ropes. Then he ran up to him and said something excitedly.

"Mais qu'est ce que vous voulez, je fais tout mon possible," we heard the reply. He was the son of an émigré long settled in France; he did not speak Polish.

"I know him," the Major said to me as we were leaving, "he's sapper Michalski. Each fifth man in our country is a Michalski. This one has forgotten the language, he hasn't much in common with Poland. But it will awake in him yet,

it will awake in him yet. . . ." He snorted into his large mustache and added with a smile: "Strange soldiers, you're probably thinking. You'll see other strange things."

And I did see other strange things in our wanderings about the area. The soldiers were quartered in decaying towns, villages, and settlements, sometimes ten kilometres distant from the railroad. All the desolate farms—and there were large numbers of them in this region slowly being deserted by its population—were taken over by new tenants. Even old castles, which had long given up their knightly calling and had been sublet to farmers or were simply disintegrating slowly under the blows of winds and rains, were pressed into service.

In one such old castle, or rather in its ruins, I met an old acquaintance, an architect, now wearing the uniform of a second lieutenant. He obviously did not have a uniform for parades only; it was covered with dust and splattered with lime. I had arrived there without warning. Our meeting was unexpected and therefore more joyous.

"My, you surprised me," he cried slapping the dust from his sleeves. "I was just cleaning up the ball room on the second floor."

He led me about the buildings as though they were historical sites. Signs of recent work were visible everywhere. The rubbish of the ruined walls had already been cleared away; some of the buildings were aided by new supports.

"I have two functions here," he smiled, "that of an officer and that of a curator of remains."

His company was quartered in a partially restored building, in an old castle tower. One went up in it by means of a circular staircase. The platoons lived in tiers, one above another.

"When I first came here," he said, "I felt helpless. The

French gave us' quarters which were worse than a pigsty. There was water standing in the courtyard, which resembled a swamp more than anything else. Everywhere there was a horrible stench; some kind of garbage was decaying in the debris. I thought that my company would run off to the four corners of the world. But no, we got to work and somehow managed to arrange ourselves. I drained the water out of the yard, had the swamp covered with gravel and tried to rescue what I could. You can see for yourself now that it's fairly presentable."

He showed me the tooth-shaped walls cleaned of moss, the small windows reinforced with sashes, the archways supported wherever necessary with new rocks. From among the weeds and shambles authentic centuries-old buildings now appeared.

"It's not strange. This is real renaissance, you see. Our Palazzo Pitti!" he cried excitedly. "Working with the soldiers was just as hard as working with this stone. It wasn't a simple matter. Two excitable elements kept quarreling; the former soldiers who had managed to make their way here from Poland and raw recruits from among the Polish immigrants in France. In every hundred men there are ten old soldiers—the rest are miners, mechanics, merchants—the entire emigration. They had left Poland long ago and had become thoroughly saturated with French life, but basically . . . When a newcomer from the old country shows up they attack him with 'Why did you lose Poland, why are you bumming around the world now?' Our soldier answers sharply, 'Since I'm here I haven't lost her yet. And what about you? Aren't you sad because they pulled you out of a bistro?' That's how it begins. Every free moment means discussions and quarrels. In the evening the whole tower shakes with the noise. Until finally someone mentions the past battles.

How a German pilot flew over a village and strafed the inhabitants. Or about what is happening in Poland under the occupation. How in Torun a Pole must get off the sidewalk when a German is passing—that's in an official notice pasted in the streets. Everything slowly becomes quiet in the tower. And, you know, that makes them agree, that makes soldiers out of them."

Another time I visited the "Spaniards," as they were called, the greatest attraction in the regiment. This was a company composed largely of volunteers who had fought in the civil war beyond the Pyrenees on the republican side. Some of them had spent a year and more under fire, nothing could impress them. They looked down on everything.

The lieutenant who commanded them told me how difficult it had been for him to get them to accept him.

"They greeted me suspiciously. For a long time I didn't know what to do with them. They looked at me askance, they kept avoiding me. Fortunately someone thought of playing soccer. One can't run away from himself while doing that. But it was the war which really brought us together. I remember one conversation about it. One old miner from the Lille region told me about it in this way: 'There's no question about it, the most important thing is class. Even in war. The Germans fought battles like gentlemen, the Poles like proletarians. The Germans arrived at their positions in camions. Not too early, at nine, after breakfast. After they arrived, they got out leisurely. Then the artillery began firing, and the tanks came up. Now, gentlemen, we will go forward. Carefully, but surely. And they went out against us, blast them, as if they were going for a walk. This lasted till six, when they knocked off. Eight hours of work were done. Again the camions came up, and they rode back for schnitzels. And you, Polish beggar, march hundreds

of kilometres, don't close an eye all night, and at nine in the morning fight tanks again. There will be rest for you in the other world.'

The lieutenant smiled: "And tell me, wasn't he right?"

I talked about this with the Major, who shouted cheerfully: "Didn't I tell you they were unusual soldiers! Just wait though, until it all awakes in them. . . ."

His red brick house was cold, the wind whistled against the windows while the poplars stood knee deep in fog. Rain filled clouds moved across the skies throughout the long days. I remember how each new day started for me with melancholy hopelessness. Sometimes at dusk we would light a fire in the Major's room, and then the pillar-like trees, swaying in the evening storm, would appear like phantoms.

Today that scene comes back to me as something unreal, as something out of a phantasy rather than from experience. In the glaring Brazilian heat, under the dazzling blueness of this sky, in the bronze shadow of the jacarand whose leaves are unmoved by the wind, the memory of that other inclement weather seems to me a strange dream told by someone else. The thought comes to me that the memory of sensory experiences, so highly praised by poets, is nevertheless transitory and more superficial than it would seem.

But how clearly I visualize everything else which that April brought with it. One morning while I was listening to the wind and rain beating at the window, the Major ran into my room:

"It's started, at last! The Allies are landing in Norway."

This was shortly after the German attack on that country, and it seemed to everyone that the Allied expeditionary force would sweep the Germans from the fjords as quickly as they had invaded them. Then someone brought a rumor from Paris that Polish forces were to go north also. There

was great commotion in the quarters. The Major walked about electrified, discussing communiqués, foreseeing outcomes of battles. The Spaniards were grumbling because they, the mountain warfare specialists, were not being sent to Norway. The lieutenant architect, when I met him again, called to me from afar:

"I've got real soldiers now. There's quiet even in the tower."

Our performances had even heartier audiences now. Our pianist played nothing but Chopin's *Polonaises*, the actress reciting a poem about the bombing of Warsaw spoke in more ringing, magnificent tones than before. Sapper Michalski stood backstage filled with emotion and pulled the curtain up time after time. I noticed that he became especially animated before the performance of the actor directing the troupe. He would call his fellow stagehand to him, and once I heard him say in a confidential voice:

"Maintenant notre épopée nationale de Mickiewicz, 'Pan Tadeusz.'"

The actor recited Jankiel's concert. Michalski stood beside his friend and listened attentively to what he whispered into his ear. He kept his head bowed and looked at the actor only occasionally.

Despite our success we felt, however, that something had changed. The hour for news on the radio became more important to us than the beginning of the show, the newsboy's whistle more valuable than the best poems. The pianist once said to me before his number:

"What would you say if I went out on the stage, shouted Long live Norway—and only then began the A flat major? That would help me greatly."

As literary adviser to the troupe I felt myself in a peculiar situation: I understood that no theatre interested these sol-

diers as much as the war. These feelings of uneasiness were dispelled by the blunt Major.

"Why are you worried," he rebuked me one evening. "Everything's all right. The real job is coming closer and other things are neglected. That's how it must be. Wars are to be fought. Do you want a soldier to take a furlough from war? We've already been shifting too long from foot to foot. Thank God it's begun!"

It was easy to notice that the Major was more excited than the others. When the news came that the Allied units were making their way through the valleys into the center of Norway, he was aroused, if one can say so, in both heart and mind. He planned further blows; pushed the Germans toward Denmark, followed them over the sea, caught them in pincers from north and south, from Hamburg and the Rhine. Actually we were all thinking and planning in a similar manner. He alone spoke about it—loudly and passionately. Each morning he woke me with new communiqués; each evening he left me with a new plan for victory.

"Today I'm taking all of you prisoners," he said once when he came backstage, as he usually did, near the end of the show, "I must explain this to you more clearly."

"What's that?" I asked.

"My military philosophy."

I expected him to paint more strategic visions for us, what would happen after the pincers from the north and the south had been closed. It turned out, however, that he had something else in mind. We all went to the battalion casino where a surprise awaited us. The soldiers had arranged a kind of parody of our show; they sang, recited, danced. Then we passed to the bar, that is, a table made of boards. The row of bottles and sandwiches did not withstand our appetites

for long. The soldiers were becoming very gay, and the Major smiled under his mustache.

"Carousing is healthy, ask any soldier. One should live singing on a merry note. We Poles—we're always ready to mourn. My God, the eternal Polish requiem over the soldier! The sadness, the sobbing—because we're such angel-soldiers. Let the devil take such nourishment! The time will come for mourning, only everything in its turn. First laugh and sing until you're hoarse. Cry a little, surely, it will help you too. But we will do that for ourselves. Do you hear how quickly that happens in the army?"

A young second-lieutenant had just finished singing a risqué song and began to sing the well known sentimental Polish ballad "In a year, in a day, in a moment, we will be far apart." The evening was a boisterous and a merry one. It was late when we were saying farewells and parting.

The Major and I left together; our house wasn't far away. It was fortunately no longer raining, but the darkness was impenetrable. A strong, cold wind blew through the streets of the village. We hooked our arms and waded through puddles of mud blindly but without hesitation. My companion spoke up:

"Actually, I can't say what I want to. Somehow I can't express it. What I want to tell you I thought of yesterday during the show while listening to the recitation from *Pan Tadeusz*. I listen to it each evening and have learned the entire piece."

And suddenly he began to speak the verses. It sounded peculiar, there was something strange in his voice. At first I could not tell what made it seem strange. Then I realized that the Major was imitating the expression and all the accentuations of our actor. This no doubt involuntary imita-

tion affected me greatly, as I heard the words flow forth in the cold air:

But more notes come and the scattered tones
Combine into legions of chords,
And march in time with harmonious sounds,
Of the sorrowful note in that famous song
About a soldier wanderer, who goes through
Woods and forests, almost dying of poverty and hunger.
Finally he falls under the legs of his faithful horse;
And the horse digs a grave with his hoof.

We were marching down the center of the road with the water splashing under our feet. The Major continued, shifting to a low bass, just as the actor always did.

An old song, much beloved by Polish soldiers!
They recognized it and gathered around
The master; listening, recalling
That dreadful time when over their country's grave
They sang that song and went out into the world;
Long years of wandering come to mind,
Over lands, seas, hot sands and bitter chill,
Among strange peoples . . .

How far away from that night I am as I write these words now! April, the same month, but how different. The same war and yet how changed. One could not know then how much infallible prophecy lay hidden in those lines. Time was to show that the Polish soldier really wandered in all parts of the world, from the coldness of the north to the sands of deserts in the south, and that our sailor sailed the seas from pole to pole. The Major, I remember, repeated "among strange peoples," and added: "Those words were written a hundred years ago, do you understand?"

We were before the house; the sound of the wind combined with the leafy poplar choir. After a fire was built in

the fireplace, my host opened some bottles. His tall figure and quick gestures filled the room.

"Perhaps our requiem over the soldier began with this song, and I'm wrong to be amazed by it. Think me a simple soldier, if you will, it's all the same. We need sharper training, I feel it through my skin. There is some other matter, some other force which we must use. I frequently repeat the words—among strange peoples—to myself. That's fine, but what comes after it? With what did we come here, what have we to offer here among strange peoples? You will agree that it isn't a song about a horse. And not only because a horse can do nothing against a tank."

He laughed and pushed a chair up to the fireplace. We sat down opposite the blaze, in which wet pieces of wood hissed loudly.

"You're looking at me and probably wondering: what's that hothead trying to do? And I am waiting until people begin to burn and roar like that fire. Otherwise nothing will come of it. Otherwise this *drolle de guerre*—a devilish name—will continue. We came here with our fire, but what of it; the world hasn't opened its stove yet. And they are building up a big fire, they'll throw everything into the kettle. Europe will yet see it. We Poles know that best. They attacked us so quickly that we did not even have time to move. They surprised us with everything, whatever you care to name: strategy, airforce, panzers. But most of all because they did not let us fight as we wanted to, by attacking, in the Polish manner. For each war is different and no one knows anything about one until he has immersed himself in it. War has to be learned, just as one learns a new language. We stopped being infants after that dreadful schooling. But what of it, with whom can we talk here? Worse still. We had something which made us fight despite everything. Even

though we could not fight in our own fashion, even though surrounded on all sides by insuperable forces. You people from the city call it spirit and think that exhausts it. Yes, we had so much spirit in Poland that we could have sent tons of it throughout the world. Such an export would have been a fine business for Poland. An excellent product and a universal demand. We couldn't send it out so we brought it with us on foot! We came here, and what of it? We're shifting from foot to foot with our spirit. There our country is dying and here they're not fighting. It is dark here, dark, I tell you, among strange peoples."

Major A. arose and paced up and down the room.

"I get furious when I think of it, even though I try to contain myself. In my darkest moments I recall an incident that happened in Poland in September. It was near Jozefow, near the Jozefow estate. When I can no longer see I repeat that name and it heartens me. It saves me like some talisman. It seemed to me then that I could do no more, I or my soldiers, but yet . . . Because everything must awake in people—he fell into his favorite phrase—you'll see that it will awake. That's why this landing affects me so greatly. It's really begun. Do you understand me now?

He filled the glasses and sat down by the fire again:

"I repeat to myself: the Jozefow estate. That means nothing to you, but to me it means a great deal. There are hundreds of such names in Poland. There's some kind of Jozefow at every step, nothing is more common. It's the same with Michalski—the name of the sapper who raised the curtain. Mine lay between Wloclawek and Kowal. On the ninth of September, I found myself there with the 22nd Regiment in which I served. You know what that means: nine days of fighting and nine nights of retreat. In this war you had to know how to get along without food or sleep, how not to

get tired or hungry. That's all right for fakirs but not for honest infantry men. We've already said that the art of war must be learned. So we learned everything, but with a vengeance. We could hardly breathe. I won't speak of chafed feet and other trifles, because that's shameful, but, believe me, we were tired beyond endurance. I emphasize that because we were to rest when we got to the pine forest south of Wloclawek. My battalion was in the rear and we were promised a breathing spell. And indeed at first everything seemed to be going well. I thought kindly of Wloclawek. There is a sun dial made by Copernicus on the cathedral tower. A pleasant city. The kitchen arrived before noon, and we got something to eat, the first time in four days. It was cool in the forest. Our artillery was firing at the Germans who were under cover about five kilometres away. One sleeps better in such a case when one is protected by big guns. I tried to find out what was happening in the world, to find out about France and England. That was what I did at all halting places. The staff knew as much as I, that is, nothing. I learned to drop in on civilians. 'Do you have a radio,' I would ask. 'What's the news?'—My God, what nonsense these people would talk! 'The Siegfried Line is broken, the bridges on the Rhine taken, the Gneisenau sunk, we are in East Prussia.' Once this, another time something else. But they couldn't fool me. 'Can you get Paris, or London?' I would ask. 'What do they say?' And here there was no answer, they had no news from there. So I would have to wait till the next halt and the next radio. It made one's stomach turn.

"I couldn't believe that nothing was happening. This time too, I thought, I would find some hut and ask for news. I circled around my men bivouacking under the pines. They lay as they had fallen. They were dried out and dirty, you

couldn't even see the whites of their eyes, they were so bloodshot. I was tempted to stretch out somewhere, but curiosity overcame my weariness. I walked out of the forest and looked around for some likely house. That very moment I saw a jeep moving through the field, it was our liaison car. 'Does this mean a new job?' I thought. I was right! The regimental adjutant brought me an order to organise another defensive attack behind the regiment. That was a nice gift! It would be easier to bury those wrecks underground than to move them from the spot! These sleeping, unconscious lads on the defense line! With whom was I to argue? I swore and set to work!"

The Major threw more wood on the fire and continued:

"You know, don't you, what the two worst things in war are? Suspense before an attack and interruption of an unfinished rest. And I had to inflict the latter on my soldiers. I dragged my men from their resting places though they had hardly stretched out their legs. I made believe that I didn't see how hard it was for them to get up and that I didn't hear their curses. Try to approach a soldier and tell him that he is a paragon and an angel and he will greet you beautifully. The officers too weaved about as if they had been gassed. I myself felt that I was disintegrating. But the order pulled me up, and I in turn pulled them up, the machine worked. I really don't know how, but I moved my men. Two companies went into the field, and I brought the third into starting position. We marched through a little wood, a meadow and another little wood. Suddenly the rattle of a car reached me again. I turned around and saw the adjutant motioning to me from a distance. What is this! Are they picking on me? A new order, a new cabal! The Germans had broken through our right flank. They must be stopped, the gap must be filled. I can't believe my own ears. Who is to attack? Must

these men fight? But an order is an order. It was about face, brother, once again. Bayonet on gun, direction—through the forest.

"I moved as if I were going to an execution. What could I do with this worn out bunch? My eyes were popping out, my head was hammering. I heard a corporal railing at someone. 'Hey, wake up, you loafer, it's the Germans you're going to fight!' My battalion of human ghosts changed formation, although the men were slipping through their own fingers. Finally they began to move slowly, like an invalid, but they moved. I looked to see whether there were any stragglers, or whether someone wasn't trying to catch some sleep under a hedge. No, they were all there, slugging along! They were pulling an anti-tank gun toward the front. It was getting hot again. I could have sworn easily, but why waste words? It's a known fact that a human being has no idea how much he can stand and where he gets his strength. Machines, I tell you, machines."

Spreading his arms wide, he fell silent for a moment, as if he had told me the most important thing, and immediately went on with his story:

"We entered on the Wloclawek-Kowal highway. I glanced at my watch, it was almost five. We had been marching an hour. I got my bearings on the map: highway, forests, a small river, and one lone human residence. I read: Jozefow estate. Uninteresting territory, but hard to penetrate. You can guess what went on in the forest. Suddenly someone reports a telephone line. We examined it. It was German. I thought to myself, it must lead from somewhere to somewhere, or in other words, I'm in the middle. Surrounded by Germans. That's a fine mess. Because the area was unguarded I deduced that it was a German motorized unit. It must have passed here, made contact and was now doing

its job elsewhere. But where? Where was the main force? Where was the gap? We cut the line. I took all necessary precautions and took a direction on the Jozefow estate. We'll see what's happening there. So we moved all out along the highway."

The Major's story was gradually taking hold of me. I had already become accustomed to his fluid nature, quick gestures, and a certain tension in all he said. It must be said, however, that it awakened a resistance within me. Not a resistance caused by dislike, by any means. This figure of a farmer in uniform, his cavalier spirit and soldierly vehemence which recalled old time officers—as though from a historical novel—everything in him was colorful and attractive. My resistance came, as I now realize, from a subconscious desire not to give in too easily to his aggression and to somehow secure myself from it. To keep cool before his excitableness and calm in face of his subjective, as it seemed to me, fervor. What amusing, laughable reactions! And what inopportune inhibitions! For hidden in him there was the warmth—even more—the truth of those times, from which I cannot sever myself and to which I keep returning in my memory. Now, in another hemisphere, that world appears before me with marvelous and difficult to describe force. As I write this it seems to me that I am still there in the red house beside the fire. I see the Major with all his swift gestures, and give myself slowly to the mood of the story and I might almost say—listen to his words.

"We went all out. You should have seen the soldiers then. My battalion of ghosts became an army again—dirty, drawn faces, but alive. All of them were bent with the effort, their packs weighed them down to the earth, but they marched on—new people, fresh strength. How did that happen? Everything awoke, yes, everything awoke. I think of that

in my hardest moments and it always lifts me up. They sensed the Germans by some mysterious instinct. Nerves evidently have their own intelligence service. We walked in silence. Not one word was uttered. The tension grew. Our heads stopped beating but our cheeks still burned. We moved from tree to tree. Everyone had his gun in hand. Suddenly from the front of the line I heard a shout, 'Germans, Germans!' A few shots fell, my first line was attacking. Bullets whizzed by, then a loud, storming 'Hurrah' was heard. Have they surprised them? The whole line lunged forward. We passed the German front lines, several of the enemy were lying on the ground bayoneted. Yes, it was a complete surprise. Forward, brothers, forward! The forest was thinning out, light was shining through. We reached the last trees and flopped to the ground. The others reached us, our anti-tank gun was there too. I was gasping, trying to catch my breath, and glanced quickly ahead. Before us stretched a muddy field covered with bushes and in the center flowed a river; behind it swamps and another forest, only not so thick.

"The bridge across the river looked very queer. I looked close; it was barricaded with felled trees. The highway in front and behind was blocked in the same way. The trees were being removed, but the job had been interrupted. It was impossible to ride or walk through. That was our own barricade. The Germans had not yet cleared it away. Somebody was stubbornly crawling among the trunks. Beyond the river to the right of the road stood a mill, beyond it other buildings. It was the Jozefow estate. The distance between the forests over the river was from 150-200 feet. The Germans were in open view, a delight for the soldiers. The lads were giving it to them with pleasure. The gun was also put into action. The Germans behind the river were feeling in

the forest with shrapnel. They had placed three guns opposite us, plainly visible among the trees. Could it be that they didn't know what had happened, that we were in front of them? One machine gun rattled from the mill and another from the road. We had to strike swiftly before they could collect themselves. Otherwise the whole surprise assault would go to the devil. We had already caught our breath and picked ourselves up again. I ran straight ahead with my group. The river looked shallow, but it reached to our waists. A few steps and we were on the swampy ground. A hundred, two hundred metres, in less than no time. Cruel slaughter, they and we were hitting blindly, but the issue was decided. The heavy gun on the left stopped firing. We were on their side. The Germans fled from behind bushes. It was quick work, as usual when bayonets are used. The guns were cleaned up, we were taking the mill. Noise, shouting, confusion. After about fifteen minutes' silence—except for the groans of the wounded. It was amazing how fast it had happened.

"I assembled my men and walked through the battlefield. There was plenty to see. The cannon on the left had been blown up by our small gun, the gun crew and the officer killed. The buildings were still smoking; we were putting out the fire. Their equipment was lying in disorder. There was as much damage as if we had fought an entire day. Everywhere there were large numbers of bayoneted Germans. We turned our heads away though something pulled them to that revolting sight. My people discovered one prize after another. Every corner was full of surprises. Near the buildings we found a large store of pioneering equipment, a complete arsenal of saws, axes, levers, and countless tools. Farther—a hundred bicycles. And that was not all. How well I remember that booty. Three howitzers, the second

machine gun untouched, three light machine guns, five trucks, three armored cars, one personnel car. What more could you want? Our casualties amounted to five men killed, among them an officer, and fifty-seven wounded, mostly by cold steel. There were about a hundred wounded Germans whom we herded into the estate. We took nine prisoners. From them we learned that we had broken up a motorized battalion and a division of pioneers. The surprise was successful. The task was accomplished, the gap was repaired."

The Major got up and began pacing the room.

"Why don't you ask me how this happened, who did it? Sleeping human shadows? I've asked that myself since that evening, but I can't answer it. God knows that the army has its own mysticism, its own mysteries from another world. They should all have died from exhaustion, and not fought and conquered. And yet they did not die, they went ahead and did their job. A mystery. Naturally afterwards a virtual pestilence fell on the men. They collapsed and I again had a slumbering crowd. We were dead tired. The pricking sensation in the forehead returned and heads became as heavy as lead. Those who stayed on their feet swayed like drunks. Dusk was falling, and I still had so much to do! I had to clear up the matter of the telephone line—the other end of it. Patrols had to be sent out, contacts made, the wounded evacuated. A lot of time passed before my volunteers fell upon the cut off German telephone operators, and before everything was set in order. Even then we weren't left in peace. Poor boys, another sleepless night was in store for them, the tenth in a row. We had to get up and march; that, however, has nothing to do with the matter. My Jozefow estate episode ended that night."

Then he added in a lowered voice.

"I don't know what this war will bring, surely many fan-

tastic wonders. Jozefow will last me for some time. I think of it often and return there in my darkest moments. That's my talisman. I carry it in my memory."

It was already quite late when we said goodnight. The wind was whistling so loudly through the poplars that it could be heard in the room. Outside the window white clouds flowed past the moon.

"This wind will clear the sky," the Major added, "tomorrow we'll have good weather."

But the next day was again rainy and cold, only the fog lifted above the poplars and disclosed their trunks overgrown with epidermis resembling plankton. During the entire time of my stay in the red country house the weather did not favor the awakened hopes of spring. We, however, did not betray them. From day to day we awaited a victory in Norway, a crossing of Denmark and the invasion of Germany. The Major always had his plans in readiness, he had an answer to every possibility.

In this mood I departed from him one April day when we left to visit other neighboring units. Fate arranged that I never met him again. But in my thoughts I accompany him to this day.

It is not difficult to guess how quickly his warm heart beat, when the rumors about the use of Polish troops in Norway were realized. How he watched for and studied the scanty news which reached France about the battles of our brigade at Narvik and Ankenes. I am sure, too, that he announced it to someone each morning and debated it for most of the night.

We found ourselves in his territory only once more, in transit, but I did not see him. He was attending battalion maneuvers and later went to a briefing at headquarters. We had come for only one show, the next day we left. I was

quartered in the town, not in the village.. Our improvised evening was for the benefit of a new group of recruits. Once again sappers were detailed to help us. The audience was cordial and applauded us heartily. After the performance we stopped in at the cafe where I hoped that I might meet the lieutenant who commanded the Spaniards, or the architect. But we found no one we knew there. Accustomed to the Major's care, we felt somewhat strange alone and left the place in a subdued mood. The sudden loneliness in this town where we had so many friends made us realize that we might lose them at any moment. Rules of war were governing the world.

I walked slowly to my quarters not defending myself against these sad thoughts. I felt that I was taking leave of the Major—alone. It is a strange emotion when we are able to grasp the moment in which something close departs forever and becomes the past. When the present changes within us into the perfect in an irrevocable conjugation.

Today there remains for me only the memory of that change. Here, in another hemisphere, as strange as if it were another planet, the magic of memory has a doubled strength, but also a double resistance of time and space to conquer. How far away I am from that land, how much of the past I encounter to reach that spring again! We are all far away and the Major, in all likelihood, is equally distant. The Norwegian campaign did not work out according to his plans, and many other incidents did not occur as we had hoped they would. From that period, however, I have left not only the melancholy memory of the passing of people and events but something else too, something that he called a talisman.

I attained the talisman during that French spring full of so many unfulfilled hopes on the last evening I spent in the town. As I was walking toward my quarters I was thinking

that that moment was removing me from the Major—perhaps forever. The street was empty and quiet. Unexpected sounds of voices made me start. Someone was walking opposite me on the other side of the street. It seemed to me that he spoke in Polish. After a moment I discerned two soldiers in the darkness. Suddenly I was struck dumb when I unexpectedly heard:

. . . recalling

That dreadful time when over their country's grave
They sang that song and went out into the world;

I stood still, unable to move. The words were spoken by a young, vibrant voice. I recognized the speaker immediately; it was hard to make a mistake. A foreign accent was imitating the expression of our actor. Just as the Major had done a few days before during his nocturnal recitation. The soldiers came up even with me and all at once they began to recite simultaneously:

Long years of wandering come to mind,
Over lands, seas, hot sands and bitter chill,
Among strange peoples . . .

It was Michalski and his friend, the stagehand. I wanted to pass them unobserved, but they noticed and recognized me. Michalski saluted, came over to my side and said, somewhat embarrassed:

"Notre épopée nationale . . . I already speak Polish."

I was so surprised that I could not answer and only shook his hands. We parted, and each went his own way.



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The Peasants

*According to the Account of
Private M.*

THE WAR WITH THE GERMANS uncovered a new army in Poland—the peasants. One can say this not only because they composed the largest part of the regular army ranks, but also for other reasons. Even though it is futile to search military terminology for a name to give to their cooperation,

each day and each night of our September confirmed it. The peasants became an "army for everything."

Because the war began to shift our units from place to place, and because it was frequently necessary to march many kilometers within twenty-four hours, the army often did not have enough maps. The peasant then became a map, a compass, and a guide. Marching at the front of the column, he led the units infallibly over roads known only to him. The soldiers thought of him as the best compass and called him the "Polish Bezar." When an unforeseen halt was called in a strange region, the peasant became the quartermaster. When the units lost contact with their bases, the peasant provided them with food. When there were not enough medical attendants, the peasant took over their duties and his home became a hospital. All this was done without compulsion; the "army for everything" was a volunteer army.

During the end of the war the Germans and the Russians covered all of Poland and the soldiers who did not want to surrender—there were thousands and tens of thousands of them—got everything they needed from the peasants: advice, shelter, a change of clothes, and aid in escape. An unknown inhabitant of an unknown village would lead men who had been wandering in the forests to his home, feed them, clothe them, and equip them for travel. Then he would direct them from one person to another until they reached their appointed destinations. He acted efficiently and thoroughly as though he were a travel bureau, hidden from the enemy and allied with liberty.

The peasant also kept arms hidden. He did not destroy them as a soldier when the units were disbanded or after the battles, when they were given to him in confidence, as to a conspirator. Our land became a hidden arsenal. ✓

Sometimes too, this versatile soldier of the army for every-

thing sought personal encounter with the Germans. His special enemy was the worst of the German depredators—the pilot. Already on the first day of the war, when the German leader opening it ceremonially in Berlin, announced: "I will not fight with women and children," many Polish women and children did not return from the fields to their homes. They remained lifeless beside hay stacks, in potato furrows, in pastures, beside slaughtered cattle, hunted down from the air by flying huntsmen. Outside of Poland, in the silence of a world surprised by war, no one believed such tortures and considered all information about them a fanciful tale. But there were photographs, made by foreign witnesses, frightening scenes of innocent death, which no one who saw them will ever forget. Beside them all words become superfluous.

But the peasant did not forgive this crime. He hunted down parachutists, sought out diversionists, and enjoyed revenge on pilots. I searched a long time for an authentic confirmation of these happenings, and finally was able to discover an eye witness of such a battle. The encounter in which my informant took part does not, however, belong to the mysteries of phenomenal events of this war. I record it because among many legends it is true, and among many experiences it is directly related to the Polish fate. This is what private M., later a well-known public figure among the Polish émigrés, told me.

"On the ninth of September I was between Warsaw and X., near a certain village which I prefer not to mention.

"The morning was unusually beautiful—it was about nine o'clock—and one did not want to think about the war. But it marched behind us, step by step. The village through which we rode was really only a painful recollection of a village. All that remained of it were skeletons of walls and heaps of ruins. The smell of extinguished fires was in the

air, here and there clouds of smoke were still rising from glowing embers. The highway, crowded with refugees, ran between the double rows of devastation. Our column moved slowly, stopping frequently. 'When did they set fire to your village?' I called to the peasants standing beside a well. 'Every day,' someone replied."

While he rested beside the well, the private learned the entire war history of the village, which for that matter, was similar to hundreds of others. German fliers did not fly over any inhabited locality without bombing it. If it was already burned down, they bombed the ruins. In addition to bombers there were fighter planes which machinegunned every visible living creature. These attacks could be expected at any time, but there were regular attacks each morning and evening. In the beginning the peasants thought it was the highway crowded with vehicles which lured the pilots, but the Germans attacked the village even when there was no one on the road. The inhabitants sought safety in the forests and returned to put out the roaring fires. When everything lay in ruins, they wandered about their devastated homes, unheeding of the danger.

"I listened to their stories," continued M., "and read what they had not said in their faces. I know the peasants; I am one of them myself. I know what peasant anger is, and peasant endurance. As we were talking, they would raise their heads and search the sky. In the group there was an older man, a small land owner, dressed in blue linen trousers, and a shirt unbuttoned over his chest. He had remained silent and spoke up in a hard, gloomy voice, only at the end of our conversation: 'They attacked our village yesterday and killed three girls. One boy's leg was cut off as if with a knife.' A low murmur swept through the group. 'And today,' he said, 'they'll be here any minute. The highway's full.'"

Private M.'s unit began to move and the entire column was again on its way.

"And what do you think," continued M., "at that same moment—I don't know whether a minute had passed—the spectacle which had been foretold began. I was far from thinking of the theatre, but a similar sequence of events might have taken place on a stage. I still heard that 'they'll be here any minute,' when suddenly we heard the sound of an engine and saw a German plane. A movement passed through the column, there were shouts and commands. The plane flew above the highway, not very high nor fast. But from the sound of the motor we could tell that this time it was arriving without murderous intent. What we heard was not the sound of a machine obedient to its pilot, not the even roar from a full throat. The motor was choking, wheezing, and backfiring sharply, explosively. Immediately in front of us, our anti-aircraft guns roared out unexpectedly. It seemed as if they came directly from the highway. Shells began to explode around the German. But the plane neither increased its speed nor did it attempt to escape upward. It kept descending as though it were searching for a landing place. Then, above a field covered with stubble, it suddenly dived sharply downward. It was about a kilometer away."

"I can imagine your excitement."

"There was no apprehension. We jumped out of the trucks. Someone shouted: 'Take him alive, take him alive!' It was then that the peasants' battle took place. As we started out for the plane I noticed that there were others before us; we were the second line. The peasants were already ahead of us. My chance acquaintances from the well were in the lead. The old peasant in the blue pants signalled with his hands to other volunteers from the village, like an attack commander. There were perhaps ten of them."

"Without arms?"

"They had started running as they stood, but I remember that some of them carried pitchforks and shovels. They approached the plane which was bouncing violently on the stubble, from the side. Our artillery had ceased firing. The peasants fanned out in a skirmish line; they attacked in military fashion.

"When the plane stopped rolling, an indistinct figure jumped out of it. We ran as quickly as possible. The pilot hid himself behind the fuselage."

"Didn't he surrender?"

"No, he began to shoot. The peasants were already encircling the plane. The shots weren't loud and came in series: an automatic pistol, I thought. One of the peasants slowly slipped to the ground and fell on his back. We were already approaching the plane. We could see the pilot shooting at the peasants. The peasants closed in on him."

"But he could have killed them all!"

"They kept jumping from one side to another, falling to the ground, and rushing forward again. Just as in battle. Finally one reached the German and jabbed at him with a pitchfork. Then the others got to him. When we reached the plane, the job was finished."

My friend then told me that he was unable to speak with anyone on the battlefield. The peasants clamored and shouted among themselves. They did not look at the strangers, paid no attention to them. This was their own affair. The old peasant kept away those who were thronging about the plane. They showed no respect even for the military.

"It was," said M., "as if they wanted to be alone to keep the whole event for themselves. Yesterday they were being killed and no one was able to defend them; today they had avenged themselves. It was their own business!"

It turned out that three of the attackers had been wounded, and one killed on the field. A long while passed before they became aware of their losses. The wounded helped carry the dead man to the highway, and only then did they permit medical attendants who happened to be there to bandage their wounds.

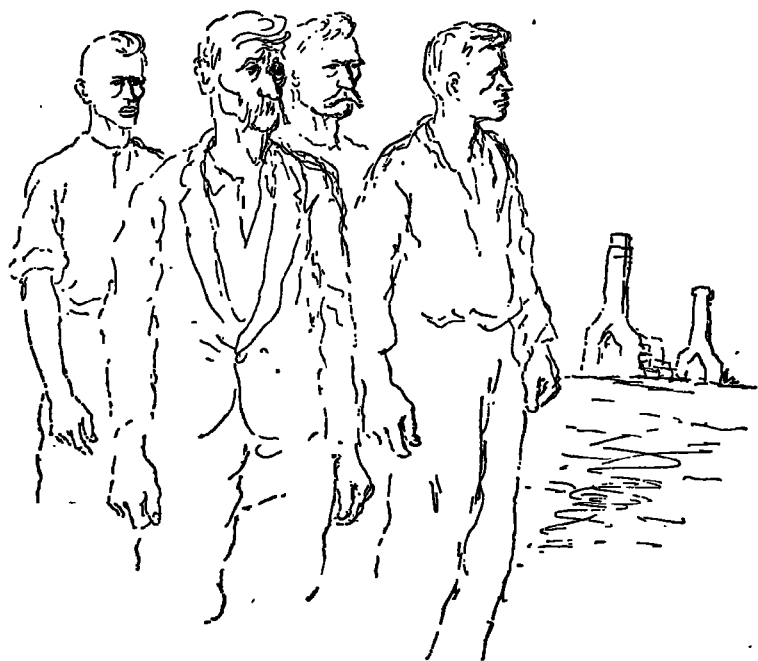
"I don't know what happened after that," M. said, "because it was time for us to leave. The caravan jolted forward, and we were again on our way. I thought, however, that on that field I had been able to grasp something of the mystery of the peasant, whom after all I know so well. Something of his inherent aloofness; perhaps, for all I know, his heedless strength and his frantic despair. Again we passed burned villages and smoking ruins; only infrequently did we see an untouched house. Along the entire road the same scene was being re-inacted. The peasants came out of the shattered huts and stood silently gazing for a long time after the men in the trucks. After the army, the civilians, the unending procession. It seemed to me that these peasants were hiding something known only to them, just as those others had wanted to lock their revenge within themselves and feed on it alone. Did you even think what that means? Do you remember how they looked at us?"

Do I remember? It was the last scene I took with me from Poland. I saw them as they dug untouched living utensils and farming tools out of still smouldering debris. They carried the salvaged equipment to cellars which were now to serve as homes for human beings. They dug up potatoes in the fields and brought in everything that remained of their harvest and their food. But even more pathetic was the sight of peasants who had stopped working or had nothing more to do and stood before the ruins of their homes, mute and motionless.

Sometimes they had walked into the center of the debris and apparently forgot about the world. Then they stood there mournfully beside their upright, begrimed chimneys. They looked straight ahead with an inscrutable gaze like the lifeless glance of a statue.

I will never forget that sight which carried the power of Biblical scenes. Among masses of refugees, as if among roving nomads, they remained on the land of their fathers, as if they were the only true natives. Amid the movements of two armies which were like passing worlds, they resisted all change—the emotionless sons of the land. They took upon themselves misfortune, revenge, and persistence—enough for the whole country. They were truly the people for everything. Even though they were not conscious of it, such was the decree of destiny which they were living.

Can one forget it?





Ambush

*According to the Account of
Second-Lieutenant S.*

I INTEND TO REPEAT this account with few marginal comments, just as I heard it, with the whole charm of a personal disclosure. This does not mean that Second-Lieutenant

S.' experience was without temptations appealing to a writer. It could be presented as an enterprising military action, and it could be woven into the tragic picture of the Polish war as an ameliorative episode—so much is it an exhibition of military training, so much imagination and bravery does it contain. For such a picture a larger background and frequent interpolations by the author would be necessary. I want only that Lieutenant S. himself speak from these pages, that the ambush he prepared for the enemy should not lose its power to surprise the reader as it did me when he told me about his experience.

It will be helpful if I mention that the hero of the incident was twenty-six years old, a professional Second Lieutenant. Tall, with a tanned face, its expression locked up within hard features, he could not be—or so it seemed—anything but an officer. He served in the Forty-ninth Infantry regiment.

The time and place of these events should also be indicated. Let us transport ourselves imaginatively to approximately the center of Southern Poland. South of the main highway and railroad joining Cracow and Lwow, or more strictly speaking, south of the district between Rzeszow and Lancut lies the town Blazowa. This locality is the quietest place on the globe and only because of the lieutenant are we disturbing the silence, up to this time unbroken, about its existence.

Lieutenant's regiment, after a forced twenty-four hour march of seventy kilometers from the river Wisloka, halted in the village of Barycz, south of Blazowa. This was the tenth of September, 1939. On the morning of this day S. was ordered to reach Blazowa where the highway from Rzeszow to Lancut ran and determine whether any Germans were there.

"I had," he told me, "ten or twelve kilometers to go. It was eight in the morning. I threw off my coat, pouch, and mask, unnecessary for such a task, took a revolver, defense grenades, and a compass. There were more than enough volunteers for the sortie. When I called out: We're going on a reconnaissance; who will go with me?, a whole company reported. I chose thirty men, all of them people whom I had trained in peace time. We took with us one light machine gun and one armor-piercing rifle.

"I inspected my men; one other officer, Second-Lieutenant A., was going with me; everything was in order. We left Barycza by way of some outlying farms of the Nowinki estate, going steadily, keeping away from roads and buildings. There was silence about the trenches; a beautiful day was beginning. It was a strange sensation—not knowing what was before me, but feeling that everything depended on me. I chose a straight course in order to get to Blazowa as soon as possible. We moved through small gullies, over the rolling terrain running from one small hill to another, achieving horizon after horizon. I used a compass to orient myself; we didn't have a map.

"My men went ahead as if on maneuvers. Time after time the scouts signalled that the enemy was not visible. The soldiers understood my silent commands; they operated so well in the field that commands were really unnecessary. When, after two kilometers, I wanted to change the scouts, who, after all, had to work most intensively, they requested my permission to keep in the lead.

"We proceeded five kilometers in this fashion—no Germans. Six—no Germans. Eight—still no Germans. At last we came within two kilometers of Blazowa. Crawling down the furrows of a potato field, we reached a bare hillock, unseen. On the top I set up the machine gun. The soldiers lay in the

still undug potato field. I decided to look more closely at Blazowa. Through my binoculars I saw the entire town clearly. It lay in a hollow below us, as in a dish dug into the terrain. A microscopic place; white housed, a shining cross on the church. Not a sign of life; just once two silhouettes ran from one doorway to another, that was all. A road cut through the town; as far as I could see there was no movement on it, neither to the left nor to the right.

"I decided to descend and reach the houses. If, in spite of appearances, Germans are there, sleeping in hiding, we'll give them a beating for a good morning, I thought. We slid from the top and hidden by the hillock began to descend. Circling fences, always keeping ourselves out of the range of human eyes, no matter from where they might be looking, we approached the town without being seen by any of the inhabitants. Finally we entered Blazowa. The clatter of boots brought some of the people out of hiding. They were much moved by our appearance and greeted us affectionately. Everyone spoke of what he had seen. A reservist standing at attention said: 'About four hundred tanks and armored cars passed this way.' The figure seemed high to me but I could establish nothing definite. 'They passed this way, they passed,' others told me. This march had apparently hurt them. Someone told me: 'They ride over Polish land like tourists.'

"I thought of what I should do next. The assignment was really finished. I had determined that there were no Germans in Blazowa. I could return to my commander and report the accomplished reconnaissance. But that meant to return with nothing. It occurred to me that if the Germans had passed in such numbers at night, then more of them would probably pass during the day. Perhaps messengers, perhaps commissary groups, perhaps something else. Getting some

information from them would be worth while. I decided to remain there and arrange an ambush. The soldiers were all for it. 'Yes, sir, let's trap them!'

"I looked about and immediately found an appropriate spot. Just before the town, before the first houses, the road leading from Rzeszow, that is, in the direction from which the Germans would come, was as visible as the palm of one's hand. I had a field of vision and five of about five hundred paces. On one side of the road stood an inn, opposite it was a school. I determined to build a fortress on that spot. You'll see how marvelously it turned out.

"Beside the road near the inn grew two trees whose trunks were so close that a rifle could be placed between them. In this natural bed I put our armor-piercing wonder. Beside the inn there was a pile of tree trunks behind which I left ten soldiers under Lieutenant A.'s command. The rest of the men I ordered to the opposite side of the road. We had the school on one side; in front of it was a fence and a row of corn. I placed the soldiers there; each one rigged up a firing position. Situated as we were, we could have had anyone who found himself on the road in a sack—but that wasn't the end.

"A narrow bridge covered the ditch between the road and the school. I ordered three men and a corporal, to whom I entrusted our machine gun, into the road. The machine gun was placed on top of the bridge and camouflaged by dust from the road. The gunner wet his helmet and smeared it with dust also. That's how my fortress, built of the earth's dust and protected by corn, looked.

"I stepped out in front of the machine gun position and inspected the fortress: it was well masked, no one could notice either the gun or the soldiers. I sent two sharpshooters about eighty paces in front of the position to the left side of the road so that they could have a view of the fields if any-

one escaping the ambush should try to seek a retreat in that direction.

"The bare structure of the ambush was prepared; now I settled what everyone was to do on a given signal. The armor-piercing rifle was to be fired on my oral command, the machine gun when I sounded one blow of my whistle, the soldiers were to fire when I whistled several times. I even arranged a trial alarm to see whether everything would go as I had decided. The thought came to me then: what a strange and unknown war we were fighting, whether all of this wasn't too primitive, and whether the entire ambush would be of any use. O corn, keep us in your care!

"For myself I chose a position near the bridge. A cherry tree grew there; I tied one of its branches to the fence to keep me from being seen and resolved to wait for what God would give us. From beneath the tree I could see the entire fort erected on the sides of the road and the road itself for about half a kilometer. Farther on it was hidden from view by clumps of trees among which it slowly ascended the hill and disappeared beyond a curve.

"Everything was prepared. We waited. Several men unbuttoned their collars, took off their helmets, and mopped their perspiring foreheads. Some one brought the soldiers some clabber with bread and butter. These moments might have been a rest after the morning march, but they were not. Too much anxiety, too much tension. We waited five, ten minutes—I don't know how many. I hadn't eaten my piece of bread yet when the observer in Lieutenant A.'s group called out: The enemy! My boys sprang to their positions without command.

"I looked at the road and saw dust rising from it. There they were. Three motorcycles in the lead, two Germans on each. They rode slowly, not more than twenty-five kilome-

ters an hour. They looked around on both sides and watched the inn and the school.

"When I saw them, something like an electric current ran through me. My heart beat rapidly. I threw a quick glance at my men. They were looking at me. I could feel their eyes. Only the men at the machine gun did not turn their heads. The gunner was glued to his place; he must already have drawn a bead on them.

"Again I looked out to the road. Rounding the hill behind the motorcycles was an armored car. It had passed the bushes and was on level ground. One, another, and another—three cars. I tried to decide whether to commence firing or to permit them to come closer. My boys kept watching me. I struggled with myself; I fought something stronger than all human forces. I waited . . . waited. They rode on and on. The motorcycles were already only fifty meters away. I saw the Germans glancing searchingly about. The cars were eighty meters away. *Now*—I thought. I stopped struggling with myself and felt a feeling of sudden ease: *Fire*—I shouted.

"The end of the word was drowned out by the first shot from the armor-piercing rifle. It was aimed perfectly. A cloud of dust rose from the road. The first car suddenly turned, ran into the ditch and remained motionless. More shots were fired. The second car turned in after the first one, crashed into it, and lay half in the ditch, half on the road. I whistled the prearranged signal and we discharged a wall of fire. We heard the first German shots. It was already too late for opposition. The third car was stopped by our shots. The motorcyclists jumped from their seats, soldiers leaped out of the cars. Several remained on the road, others hid in the ditch under the cars. A few tried to escape into the fields toward the left, running toward the near-by trees. My two

men in advance positions trained their rifles on them. Standing unprotected in their places they did not miss their targets. They showed that they were sharpshooters.

"The road, quiet a moment before, was now covered with dust and confusion. I called out to my men: One salvo with grenades—then forward—hurrah! We ran up to the cars and motorcycles in the smoke from the grenades. One man lay down on the road and began shooting under the cars. We finished the task as quickly as we had begun it.

"I reached into the cars and pulled out pouches and briefcases. One glance at the contents told me they were important plans. At the top of a page I read: *Order for the tenth of September, 7:05 A.M.* It had been issued one hour before we left Barycz. I immediately sent a non-com and two soldiers to the division commander with the captured materials. We did not have much time. I heard an artillery shot; before the inn a column of earth flew into the air. We destroyed the equipment with hand grenades; a conflagration flared up on the road; the cars and motorcycles were completely demolished. Germans lay all around us. The highest ranking officer was a Lieutenant-Colonel, other officers of high rank lay beside the cars. All were dead. The artillery kept shelling us and we retreated to the hill. I gathered my people and inspected them to find out whether anyone was missing. No, they were all there; I had lost no one. Great happiness, confidence, embraces. We returned without hurry and without being pursued by the enemy. At twelve o'clock the captured materials were received by the division command. A short while later I returned with my squad. That's all there was. That's the end."

After talking with the Lieutenant I was able to meet the commander of the division in which the young officer served. I asked him whether he had heard of the Lieutenant and



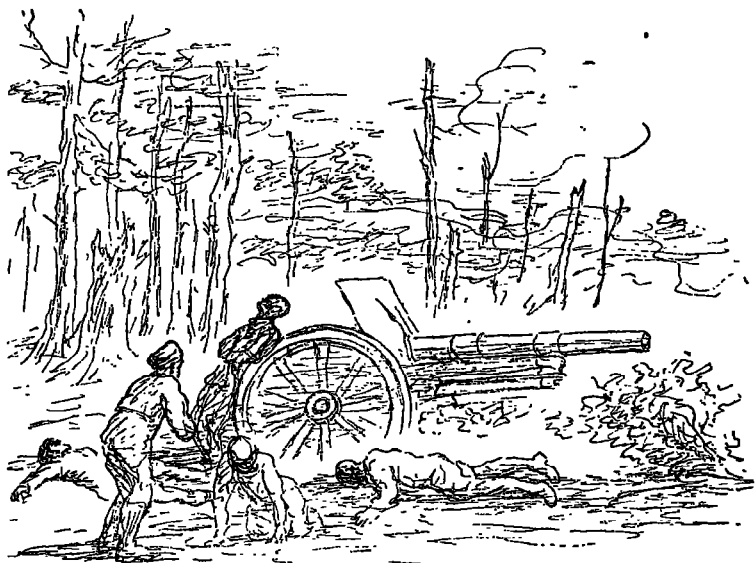
whether he knew the results of the reconnaissance in Blazowa.

"How could I help knowing of it," he told me. "The materials captured by him turned out to be priceless. I was able to ascertain that the advance units of a flanking column of the German Fourth light panzer division fell into his ambush. In the cars was the staff and among the materials I found the division's operational plans. From the signs on the map I learned where the division was going, what its assign-

ment was, and what its strength was. That was of great help to us; it gave us first-hand information about the enemy. That's hardly a trifle."

As I heard these words, I became aware that Lieutenant S. must have known what he had sent his division out of the destroyed cars and what the contents of the pouches and briefcases were. But he had not said anything about them. He talked about the whole episode as if it were self-contained without further consequences. When we were saying good-bye to each other, he said:

"I don't know to what use you'll be able to put my story. We have undergone countless experiences like that one. It was an ordinary ambush—nothing more. But if you insist, there is one thing for which I would ask. When you write the story, say that I am a Kashub. I come from a Kashub family, from our Pomerania. The Germans say that the Kashubs are not Poles. They write whole tomes claiming that we are a separate tribe and God knows what else. That's not true. I wanted to tell them that on that Sunday in Blazowa. Please write that. It's all I ask."



Unknown Soldiers

*According to the Account of
Lieutenant P.*

NOW THAT WE ALL KNOW each other in our family of fighting nations, now that we know how each one fights, what kind of a soldier a Scot is, or an Australian, or an American from a farm near Mexico, or an Indian of the Himalayas, it seems to me that there is some advantage in relating the story of Lieutenant P., whom I met in New York, and who, in connection with just that matter told me of an episode from the campaign in Poland.

"We fought blindly," he told me. "In dark nights, with almost no reconnaissance or arms. Those are old things, even though they will never cease being wonders. But besides that we fought without knowing each other. That is not an

insignificant addition. Normally a commander must know his soldiers and the soldiers their commander, only that knowledge is creative. In battle one enters into his role just as a hand slips into a glove. There's no time for getting acquainted with men or for psychology. There is firing going on! Nevertheless I commanded soldiers about whom I could say much—only not that I knew any of them.

"On the ninth or tenth of September—I no longer remember which—I was riding by horse from Lwow to Przemyśl with an important mission. When I had ridden about half the way a dust-covered, unshaven man stepped out of a peasant hut and called to me: 'And what are you doing here?' I recognized him finally by his voice, or rather by the foreign accent of his speech. It was my former commander at the officers' artillery school, Colonel Z. It turned out that the road to Lwow was cut off and there was no other way of getting there. 'Stay here with me,' he said. 'I'm lacking a commander for an anti-tank battery. Your order will be sent through when the road is opened.'

"That was how I came to command a unit which I had never seen. It took me a good deal of time to find it. Because it was already dark I slept in a near-by mill, no less important a fact than the promotion to commander. The next day, after reporting to the divisional headquarters, I began my search. I was ordered to ride four kilometres east of Sadowa Wisznia where the battery was to take up positions along the road in anticipation of a German tank attack. I took five men with me and rode off. Around noon I reached the assigned spot, but the battery was not there. Traffic was unusually heavy on the road. Wagons loaded with wounded were streaming towards the rear, and the kitchens were going forward. One could feel that we were nearing action.

"I kept searching for the battery, following my nose rather

than the map. In the meantime I was witness to an incident which I cannot pass over in silence.

"We were already quite hungry and stopped before a peasant hut which looked well to do. The housewife immediately began to prepare some eggs, and her children ran out for some milk. We had barely begun eating when German planes appeared above the road about a hundred metres away. Several waves of planes strafed the wagons. Bombs kept bursting in an uninterrupted roar. As the Germans turned back I said to the woman: they might notice our horses and burn your house—it would be better if we rode away. To that she answered in one breath, as though reciting, in a way which struck chill into our bones: 'Let them burn it, let them kill my children, as long as we win. Here are some potatoes, without gravy, but anyway.'

"The hut was rocking like a pendulum from the force of the explosions. In the yard the horses were neighing fearfully. I looked at my men—now they would show what they were worth. They held themselves well. We ran out into the road to help. It was a bitter sight, but they stood it well too. They rescued a soldier who had been buried under some sand. He was as black as a Negro and unconscious. 'You corpse, come back to life, there's no time for caresses,' one of them shouted. I thought to myself—not bad.

"It was evening before we found the battery. The position was not of the best, but at any rate there it was! Even that was good. The sergeant called the men together. I saw my men for the first time. We looked at each other—how shall I say it—questioningly. At night, it must have been about ten, while riding to the briefing session I met the former commander of the battery, Second Lieutenant M. near a burning estate. He was bent over his horse, apparently exhausted. I saw his silhouette outlined against the glow of the fire which

shone through the trees. We shook hands without getting off our horses. That was the extent of our acquaintance. We divided our tasks; I took the battle assignment and gave him charge of the matériel.

"I returned to my battery but did not bring my men good news. We had to change our position. Instead of sleeping we had to transport ourselves during the night and prepare our new positions until dawn. I tried to hear whether they cursed much and attempted to look at myself through their eyes. Our positions were more convenient now, even though the Germans harassed us with their artillery. In the morning a plane flew low over us, but I thought that it could not observe very much because of the fog which covered us. The fire of the Germans must have made the men nervous, because there is nothing worse than sitting still under fire. We had an order not to fire, so that our position would not be disclosed. I told them that, but an order is an order and nerves are nerves.

"At eleven o'clock Lieutenant M. rode up and reported that dinner would be ready immediately. 'Food is good for worry,' someone said beside me.

"I took over the battery formally then. The sergeant gathered the men, crews of four guns, one of which was damaged. Only unknown faces. Both sides felt somewhat ill at ease. There was no ceremony. Standing before them I wondered what tomorrow would bring, whether it would unite us or carry us apart.

"We were in the first line. The observation point was with our battery. The day went by slowly, and the firing kept tormenting us increasingly. Finally our artillery spoke up and the infantry also began firing. We thought that the Germans were attacking and waited for the tanks. The tension grew.

"Suddenly we noticed that our infantry was withdrawing.

The artillery observation points were left in the first line. My men did not move.

"At five o'clock I was called to the chief of the divisional staff for a briefing. An attack on the Germans was being prepared. We were to carry out a flanking maneuver. The road was the axis, the direction—Lwow. It was necessary to withdraw, go south and strike from the flank, from the right side of the road. We were to be ready to move at eight in the evening. All unnecessary transport was to be left behind.

"I returned to my men animated. To work, boys, now we'll really come to know each other, I said. I couldn't manage to say anything more intelligent than that. All talk was needless anyway. The work went along as smooth as silk.

"I was ordered to proceed with the advance guard. When we were ready to leave the forest the commander of the regiment which our battery supported decided that we would go with the spearheads. I gave the appropriate orders. The ammunition lorries and the damaged gun remained with the main body of the advance guard, the three remaining guns were moved ahead.

"It was nine in the evening. We moved out of the forest onto level terrain. Our road was a path in the fields which we kept losing from under our feet. The night was dark, lighted up by the red glow of fires all around us.

"After several hours of marching we found ourselves in a rather peculiar situation. Colored rockets began to explode on both sides of our detachment. The Germans were illuminating the terrain, perhaps signalling our presence. We marched through these rows of lights for about fifteen minutes. The men were not in the least affected by the illumination.

"Most unexpectedly we nabbed a German sergeant beside

a haystack. He did not help us much because he wouldn't talk. Afterwards we came upon two burning German cars, beside them lay an already burned motorcycle. We couldn't tell who had burned them, whether our shells or the Germans themselves. It made no difference—we felt that the battle was approaching.

"We had marched about twelve kilometres experiencing these and other incidents until finally we began to ascend a small hill. I remembered it from the map looked at during the briefing. On the other side there should be a settlement. The elevation dipped down toward it slowly. It seemed to me that I could see the indistinct outlines of houses below.

"Then our trial began. When I reached the top of the hill several rockets appeared in the air suddenly and lighted up the terrain before us. The outlines of the houses were more distinct. And so it's to be here—I thought. Firing began simultaneously. From the right and the left, from both sides of the village the artillery opened up. It was direct fire and we could see the gun flashes five hundred metres ahead.

"At this moment my third gun was coming to the top of the hill, the other two were already descending. I should really have turned back and taken cover behind the elevation, but the infantry would think that we were retreating. I remained where I was. The guns were quickly unlimbered, as we call it. There was no time to pull the guns into position, and we had to roll them by hand. Horses and riders returned to cover, and we began firing immediately, straight ahead.

"There could have been no harder assignment for a detachment lacking practice. We fought in darkness, under fire, surprised, and without cover. There could hardly be a worse situation. Nevertheless we entered into our work just as a hand slips into a glove.

"My targets were the gun flashes. In order to mislead the Germans I fired alternately at their right and left wings. I tried to make them think we had two batteries. That wasn't an easy matter. After each shot we had to turn the gun forty-five degrees. I preferred that to disclosing my own weakness.

"The German fire was very strong. If it were not for the difficult task which consumed all our energies, one could have gone mad in that rain of fire. My losses grew. There were already three people missing at two of the guns. The bombardier of the left wing gun ran up and reported that he had only two left out a six man crew. I hurried there and helped the gunners fire the gun. They worked efficiently and aimed accurately. Our infantry came up and opened up a heavy fire. That eased our situation immediately. The village below us was burning, and the Germans seemed to have weakened. That was the last thought I remember in that moment of battle.

"An unexpected explosion threw me to the ground. When I came to I was alone. Hell raged around me. I realized that I was lying between the second and third guns. Someone was shouting 'we're out of ammunition!' Everything came back to me immediately. This was the battle. These were my three guns, the fourth was in the rear. First, that call for ammunition. Who was calling? A soldier. My soldier whom I did not know.

"I got up and felt no pain. There was no time for thought. I got back to work. My soldiers were toiling unceasingly. I remembered that the fourth, damaged gun which was in the rear would have enough ammunition for the three remaining in action. It must be brought up.

"We got off a few more shots and then our infantry rose to attack. The German fire quieted abruptly. Quickly running lines passed by us. I noticed Colonel Z., my former com-

mander at the military college, with rifle in hand. I ordered the guns limbered, and we moved after the infantry. Day was breaking.

"Before us lay the burning village. The Germans were struggling in the center of it after having been thrust back from the open ground by our attack. The infantry was making quick work of them. We rode into a street covered with flames on both sides. My riders jumped down and captured prisoners. At every step there was a burning German car. We destroyed two tanks.

At the outskirts of the village we could go no further. A bridge crossing the river which flowed there had been blown up. The guns stuck in the sand and the horses could not drag them out. We were forced to stop.

"Only then did I notice that I was wounded. When it happened, I don't know. There was a small cut in my head. As I was being bandaged I noticed that the soldiers were gathering boards and planks. On their own initiative they were preparing a crossing.

"It was already light. I looked at them with an emotion which I cannot express. I knew their faces and gestures, but not their names. There had been no time for that. They were my men, devoted men with whom I had been in battle. Unknown soldiers—isn't that the best name for them?

"Something like this was going through my bandaged head when I heard a familiar voice. The corporal who had been in my searching party was shouting with a Lwow accent: 'Push, brothers! We've got to win this war. Our women fry eggs for us even while they're being bombed. Push! Hey, work!'

"The planks they had gathered were already lying across the damaged bridge. The soldiers trundled the guns onto the boards and pushed them forward."



All Is Not Yet Finished

*According to the Account of
Second Lieutenant R.*

THIS WAS the worst, because it came after victories. After the attack on Lodz, after the taking of Lowicz, after defeating Germans. We knew as much about the whole war as a horse with blinders, but we felt victory in the air. We were going forward; we had passed long lines of prisoners; we had entered conquered towns and villages where the inhabitants wept with joy at our sight and kissed our hands—that was enough for us. As late as the night of September fif-

teenth our unit attacked the village Walewice and annihilated a battalion of Germans there. It seemed that nothing could withstand us. Suddenly we were ordered to stop operations and withdraw. That was the worst—it broke our backs.

"On the sixteenth of September I received orders to prepare a crossing over the Bzura River. We were to cross it, head for the great Kampinos forest and from the north-west reach Warsaw which was already being attacked by the Germans. 'Prepare a crossing' sounds lovely, but in our circumstances it meant nothing more than finding a ford.

"I commanded the 3-rd squadron of pioneers attached to the Posen Cavalry Brigade. My equipment had become worn, as had my men. I had no pontoons for building a bridge. My task was to find the shallowest spot with a hard bottom and with convenient approach and egress in the generally steep banks of the river. That was all.

"The order reached me about nine in the evening; around midnight I had located a ford. The bank on our side was level with a gradual slope. On the other side there was a gap about as wide as three cars in the precipitous banks. I marked the crossing with bunches of twigs and notified headquarters of my position by messengers. In addition to mine, two other crossings were being readied and sappers were building a bridge near by.

"I was ordered to remain at the crossing until the evening of the next day. Just in order to play safe I had my men dig provisional air raid shelters. Each man dug a foxhole for himself, in chessboard pattern. It turned out to be a not exaggerated precaution.

"The crossing was begun immediately. First the infantry waded across up to the waist in water. There were a good many of them. Then two regiments of cavalry and one of

mounted riflemen splashed across. They penetrated into the forest and at once began to attack some Germans who had somehow managed to come through.

"At dawn an indescribable sight presented itself to us. The entire plain before the river was crowded with wagons, artillery, caissons, and cars. A surging mass of people, animals, and machines. The entire conglomeration hummed with noise while columns of dust towered above it. All these—waiting to cross.

"I had to straighten out snarls and order the vehicles into a single file before they could begin crossing. It wasn't an easy matter. How could one maneuver in such a throng where there wasn't even enough room to turn a wagon around? A medical unit was the first to reach the bank—about two hundred wagons with wounded men. At the head there were eighty wagons with Germans, four to a wagon. The wagons moved at a turtle's pace as the attendants called out, 'slow, be careful.' I wanted to hurry them up, but each time the wagons jolted the men screamed and moaned. It was painful to hear. I kept rowing from one side to the other in a boat that had been found somewhere trying to keep what order I could. About thirty wagons had crossed when suddenly something frightful occurred.

"It was about four or five in the morning. The deep throbbing of plane engines was heard, first faintly, but then with increasing volume which drew near with the swiftness of lightning. A big attack, I thought to myself, and felt a chill come over me. An air raid on this level plain, on this great mass, without any protection! I had barely thought this when hell or something worse than hell began. Dive bombers were the first to attack. They attacked my crossing, the two other crossings, the troops and supply columns gathered in the fields. They flew in formation and peeled off singly to

attack us. The frightened horses tore their harnesses and jumped on one another. The soldiers ran toward the river; the wagons standing near the edge plunged down the steep banks. It was a day of judgment. One didn't know what to do, where to go. The pioneers fled to the chessboard position. I crouched in the nearest crevice. Now the dive bombers returned and strafed us with machine gun fire. They were followed by bombers which dropped bombs on us from a great height.

"When we could begin to collect ourselves, we were faced with an even greater horror. Dust rose above the earth in high walls and hovered in the air, like a moving ceiling. Out of this suffocating grayness issued the distressing noise of neighing horses and groaning men. Even now I still hear cries of *Hilfe* by the wounded Germans whose own air force had attacked them in the crossing. The fields were full of bomb craters and mutilated corpses. Strewn about everywhere were bits of wagons. The river was congested with overturned wagons, the dead bodies of men and horses, and ruined equipment. Over this ghastly bridge soldiers were jumping, fleeing, screaming. . . .

"After the clamor had abated slightly, we did not know where to take up our work, whether to begin with the newly wounded, or to soothe the maddened horses, or to continue the crossing, or whether to do some other of the many tasks which had to be done. I tried to get as many men across the river as I could. The remainder of the wounded were moved across, and then the mounted artillery galloped through the river. Then came a new attack, a new hell, a new madness. After the second attack I had to clear the river in the crossing area. Every moment the current swept down planks, wheels, and bodies of wagons. We waded into the water and kept pushing away the wreckage with long poles. Out of one

wagon, I remember, floated a transport of cigarettes. I can still see it spreading slowly over the water.

"So passed the horrifying day of the seventeenth of September. The attacks continued throughout the day. Every half hour there was a respite long enough to permit one group of planes to return to its base while another group swept out over us. We learned later that we had been attacked by the entire German air force on the Polish front—thousands of planes had gathered over the Bzura River. Then we knew only that we had to leave this place as quickly as possible if any one was to survive. When the inferno quieted temporarily I ran to the crossing, for now it was necessary to keep clearing it constantly. The remains of the shattered bridge built by the sappers and parts of wagons kept obstructing the passage.

"When it began to get dark the attacks ceased. I remained in my position until six, according to orders. Then I crossed the river with my men, and we marched into the forest. We reached Gomolki Krolewskie where the staff of my brigade was located. On a narrow forest road I met the Brigade commander, General Abraham. He was wounded, but talking with his officers. We began to gather as much of the Brigade as we could. Out of the shattered units we made new, nameless ones. It turned out that our ammunition, only part of which had been brought across the river, was insufficient. Patrols returned to the ammunition parks left on the other side of the river and began to transport it. The people of the locality brought us bread, cheese, and pieces of meat. The cavalry men packed food into their saddle bags and loaded sacks with provisions for their horses.

"Late at night I saw an unusual procession passing by. A color guard bearing three regimental flags rode past. We did not speak to each other for we guessed what was happening.

Shortly afterwards we learned from the head of the column that the flags had been cut into pieces and distributed among the soldiers.

"We were sure that our situation was hopeless, but we moved forward slowly. It was a difficult night march. A burning sky in the distance was our only light. We heard muffled sounds of artillery. Somewhere men were fighting.

"The next day was another ordeal. The Germans bombed the forest from the sky and raked it with artillery fire. Each moment our situation was becoming more difficult. Why not say it? We awoke at the deepest point of our defeat. How could we believe that not long ago we had been conquering, regaining our land, driving the Germans before us? When had this been, centuries before?

"On this day another hill of misfortune descended upon us. We received news of Russia's entry into the war. For several hours afterwards I was almost unconscious, perhaps from exhaustion. At any rate I do not remember much of what happened then. We told the soldiers what had happened. Every one was tormented by thoughts which it is impossible to express. The Germans attacked us along the fire breaks, and we had to fight again. General Abraham himself manned an anti-tank gun. After we repelled them we thought it was our last effort, that now we could only collapse. And then we were told that we were marching on Sierakow, to take it by a frontal assault.

"Dusk was falling. As I was eating some dry bread and sausage some one called out, 'we'll make up a cavalry team.' Senseless words, there was no magic in them, but they settled all our doubts. I was ordered to protect the flank of the Seventh division of horse artillery. The attack against Sierakow was to begin at night. Some sort of motorized unit was occu-

pying it. We moved up to our positions. 'Cavalry team,' the cavalry men repeated to themselves when they met. It was at once challenge and password. When it became dark, fires brighter than those of yesterday lighted up the skies. We now knew that one was above Modlin and the other, more distant, above Warsaw. The reverberations of artillery were more distinct.

"I must confess that these signs meant more to us than any other news. We were completely isolated and did not know what was happening in the rest of the country. We didn't know whether to try to save ourselves as best we could, or whether there was still reason to keep advancing. Now it was clear—our people were still fighting. All was not yet finished.

"My own work kept me from seeing much of the battle for Sierakow. I laid out mines in the fire breaks where we expected the Germans to attack. The attack began at dawn. The artillery, which I protected, worked excellently. Captain N. rode his motorcycle from one position to another directing the firing. The Germans attempted counter-attacks and their armored cars tried to pierce the flank of the artillery. Five cars were blown up by my mines.

"In the morning we entered the village, only to pass through it and go on. When we reached the edge of the forest the bandaged General assembled the officers.

"We learned that Warsaw was surrounded but defending itself. Just as we in the forest and everyone in the whole country. Our conjectures turned out to be right. That's an important fact.

"But we could not continue our attack because our ammunition was exhausted. The only thing left to do was to leave our horses where they were, divide into platoons, and get through as best we could.

"A new day was dawning. Dark clouds of smoke were rising in the sky. The roar of artillery continued without pause. I gathered my men together and divided them into groups. Each man had no more than five or six bullets in his rifle. With fixed bayonets we went on."



The Song in the Night

THE POLISH ARMY IN CANADA was being formed in two places: in Windsor and in Owen Sound. From Windsor one can see Detroit, the high masses of the skyscrapers and the river, as big as a lake. At night mountains of windows blaze across the river; one might imagine fantastically that these were some new Black Hills chiselled with light in the darkness. In Owen Sound one goes to bed early. It's a quiet town without superstitions. Our soldiers were camped beside Georgian Bay. They could look at wooded hills and soft valleys. One of the wanderers from Poland said to me:

"If it were not for this bay one could think that we were in Poland, somewhere along the Carpathians."

He waved his hand at the spreading hills and forests in the melting spring snow; perhaps he was right.

In Windsor it was difficult to find anything of the Polish landscape. Looked for everywhere where there were Polish eyes, it was hidden here in people. But it happened that in this city I came to know perhaps the deepest truth about my country.

It happened under the influence of the talks about the war which I had with General Duch. He can say much; he knows many armies and wars. During the campaign in Poland he fought for the fourth time in his life; in France the fifth time. The General's uniform was worn by a man still young who had fought in Poland as a colonel. He had joined the army when he was seventeen. Short and stocky, he laughs freely; his calling has not destroyed his good nature. He does not carry his pack of adventures for exhibition, of course, but when he opens it there is nothing more straightforward than those reminiscences.

Once I visited him to play a game of chess, but it did not go very well. We were talking about the fact that we are called incorrigible romantics by the world and that people frequently complain that we are difficult to understand. The General regarded the traits which brought forth this opinion true of us but difficult of explanation to strangers because they were frequently incomprehensible to ourselves. Shortly we had gone so deep into the matter that we pushed the chessboard, on which the figures had long lost their freedom of movement, away, and my host told me about an incident which, since then, I cannot forget. It had to do with the campaign in Poland.

"Now," he said, "this war is a war of five continents and seven seas, as people commonly say. Then it was a war of the solitary Poles. On the twenty-second of September, 1939 we were being pressed by the Germans from the west and by Russians from the east. We were in the center, in the Lublin area, and were making our way south. In such situations there is nothing to fight for, but we then had everything in our heads except capitulation. That alone may seem incomprehensible to some, but that's how it was. That day

we had captured a town forgotten by God called Miasteczko. It lies south-east of Zamosc. In the evening we immediately struck through the forest which began on the highest elevation in the area. I should say, the edge of the forest, for that was all we could see before us. I knew from the map that it descended gradually to the south, toward the village Barchaczow. That Barchaczow stuck fast in my head like a nail in a wall. With it in our hands we gained roads, we gained passage toward Tomaszow Lubelski, toward Krasnobrod, everywhere—into the world. Without Barchaczow we were in danger of being squeezed between two walls.

"We struck, therefore, at the edge of the forest and took it by storm. It was already night when we got under cover. We shook the sand from our uniforms. Whoever could, fell asleep immediately. We had been fighting ten days already; it was the usual thing in the Polish war. Before us was the Eighth division of German infantry, partially motorized, with tank reconnaissance units. We were pushing it out of each hiding place with difficulty, but somehow we went ahead.

"The night passed quietly. The next day, the twenty-third, we began further attacks. We wanted to break through with our previous impetus, but the Germans' firepower was too strong. The attack failed, and it was necessary to lie low in the forest until neighboring units moved up from the right and the left. A whole day was taken up by this, and the twenty-fourth of September had come. It was decided then to strike along the entire front. The first attack was entrusted to the left wing. It was to begin the attack at twelve noon and make for the little town Komarow which lay before it.

"In the meantime we had news from headquarters that the Russians were marching in from the east and were only thirty kilometres away. This news brought everyone, from commander to private, to his feet. Everyone thought: attack,

attack quickly. I inspected my positions—at that time I commanded a division—and found everything in order. The artillery worked especially well. There was a good deal of it. Three brigades of light artillery and one of heavy—that means something. Twenty-four guns were firing from the first lines, the others from hidden positions.

“We waited for the left wing to begin the attack, but it did not take place. Instead I received a report from the right flank that the Germans had moved and were attacking us. The first lines of the attackers dispersed under the fire of light artillery which fired shrapnel point blank. Despite that the Germans began to infiltrate the forest. The wing was bent, and a counterattack was necessary. The men could not stand the tension. My staff telephone operator, a corporal, jumped away from his phone and stood at attention: ‘I’ll join the attack, sir, please allow me.’ Our men were attacking about a hundred or two hundred feet away from my station and threw the Germans back with one push. The corporal returned covered with sweat and brought back a German light machine gun. For a moment the attack ceased, even though the firing did not stop and the artillery kept operating. There began again a nervous waiting. Our neighbors to the left were not giving any signs of life. Twelve o’clock had passed long ago.

“At two-thirty we tried again on our own. We attacked the Germans and at first everything went smoothly, but then it became more difficult. We couldn’t beat them out of the dense undergrowth. After two hours the attack succumbed. Barchaczow was becoming more valuable by the minute. What should we do? This contredanse certainly would not bring us any closer; once they go forward, then we. The tension became unbearable.

“All of a sudden, about five, the firing increased unexpect-



edly, and the news came that the Germans were again attacking our right flank. They were coming up in threatening force. I felt this was a critical moment: either we or they! 'Everyone alive—attack,' I shouted. Everyone went into action: the reserves, a company of sappers, the staff company, a platoon of phone operators, ordnance men, the divisional staff officers and I. We ran toward the right flank, into the center of battle. Bayonets, the Polish specialty, carried the men irresistibly forwards. The artillery threw its fire forward. Our attack brought the whole line to its feet. The attack became general. In my sector we pushed back the Germans with the first blow, then destroyed all resistance completely. I don't know whether any of them got off unhurt. We cleaned out the forest: on the battlefield we found eighteen light machine guns with ammunition.

"It was getting dark when I returned to my former station. After the hot day a cold wind sprang up; a welcome ally after such work. I sent patrols out. In the distance one could still hear the rattle of machine gun fire. From the reports I received after establishing contact with my units there was no doubt that our victory was complete. Barchaczow was taken and the roads cleared.

"Among the booty we found light tanks, armored cars, and a fleet of trucks. Over thirty prisoners who escaped the disaster were interviewed immediately. Their information only confirmed the completeness of our victory.

"With what joy did I relax then! We were saved. The firing in the distance was dying down. With the wind came the cool night air. I was deliriously happy. I assembled the staff officers, and we got back to work. The locations of the units were checked, and they were moved that night. The corporal who had captured the German machine gun was shouting

into a speaker, 'All right, all right, but we gave them as big a beating as you did.' A glow was spreading over the sky; Barchaczow, which had been fired by shells, was burning.

"Suddenly, there happened something which I cannot think about to this day without emotion. From the right, from the right flank which had borne the hardest trials in these battles, there floated an unexpected echo. At first it was difficult to determine what noise or shouts were carried in the air. All of us listened in surprise and quickly recognized that it was a song. The melody was becoming ever clearer, even though the wind altered the tones and shattered the words. The echo sounding among the trees repeated from all sides:

Poland is not dead yet,
While we are alive.

A silence fell on our people. It was interrupted by the corporal: 'Barchaczow wants to know what's happening.'

Someone answered: 'They're singing.'

We fell silent again. The song, begun no one knew by whom, was taken up by others; one could hear how it moved among the units invisible in the darkness. I'm an old soldier and have experienced much, but nothing like this has ever happened to me. The well known words resounded in that forest and in that night with a fearful meaning. It was being sung by men who had come through the battle only to confirm their words in a new battle. I listened to the song as though for the first time.

"Listening to the unexpected song I stood a long time without words, and then began walking in the direction from which it came. The wind rushed through the branches, and the flaming sky was a faultless compass. Before I reached the

source of the song, however, the men stopped singing and everything became quiet. The song had passed as quickly as it had come from an impenetrable space."

That was all the General told me about the battle of Barchaczow that evening after the unsuccessful game of chess. Another time I learned that after the victory he had gone to Komarow to discover for himself what had happened with the neighboring units on the left flank. He found there a company of pre-induction trainees, about sixty boys, most of them high school students. They were gathered in a street under the command of a lieutenant. "Please take us with you," they cried, as soon as his car stopped before them.

"I looked at their young faces," he told me, "they were no more than sixteen or seventeen. They even threatened me: 'If you don't, we'll go ourselves.' What was I to do with them? I incorporated them into my troops and ordered that they be spared as much as possible. In the next battle near Krasnobrod twenty percent of those boys died. It was reported to me that they fought to the end; they, too, confirmed the words of the song. That is our romanticism, perhaps incomprehensible, I don't know," the General finished.

That evening I returned home slowly. From the Windsor coast one could see the mountains of lighted windows in Detroit. Ice floes moved over the leaden water.

Two events, the song in the night and the crusade of the young volunteers, fused within me as though flowing from one current. Nor could I forget that my chess partner had also been only seventeen when he entered the army.

Slowly I walked down the empty boulevard in the foreign Canadian city. How far I was from the land looked to yearningly wherever there were Polish eyes! But I did not feel lost in this remote country, and the strangeness helped me see

more clearly things which lose their significance when they are near.

I thought of how, ever since Wybicki in a mazurka which became the national anthem hazarded a prophecy about the immortality of his country, this song has been sung among us by every generation—bass, tenor, alto, soprano. Their choruses gathered in places unknown to the world, among towns forgotten by God, beneath skies flaming over forests, and waited their turn like a company of soldiers. The song which sprang from them mingled with the groans of the dying, but those who remained alive took it up anew. The theatre of the world perhaps did not listen carefully to the aggressive melody and wondered at the insufficiently understood choristers. But the time had now come when the meaning of the Polish song had become the refrain of universal liberty. The five continents and the seven seas were like the Barchaczow forest, lost among the great spaces of the globe. The sky blazing over the hidden village was now an infallible compass.

It was already late when I turned off the boulevard into my street. The mountains of windows in Detroit were dissolving in the darkness. From the river came the singular sound of grating, grinding ice floes slowly moving on the water. That evening I did not feel lonely in the foreign city.



